MAY, 1911

THE CAVALIER

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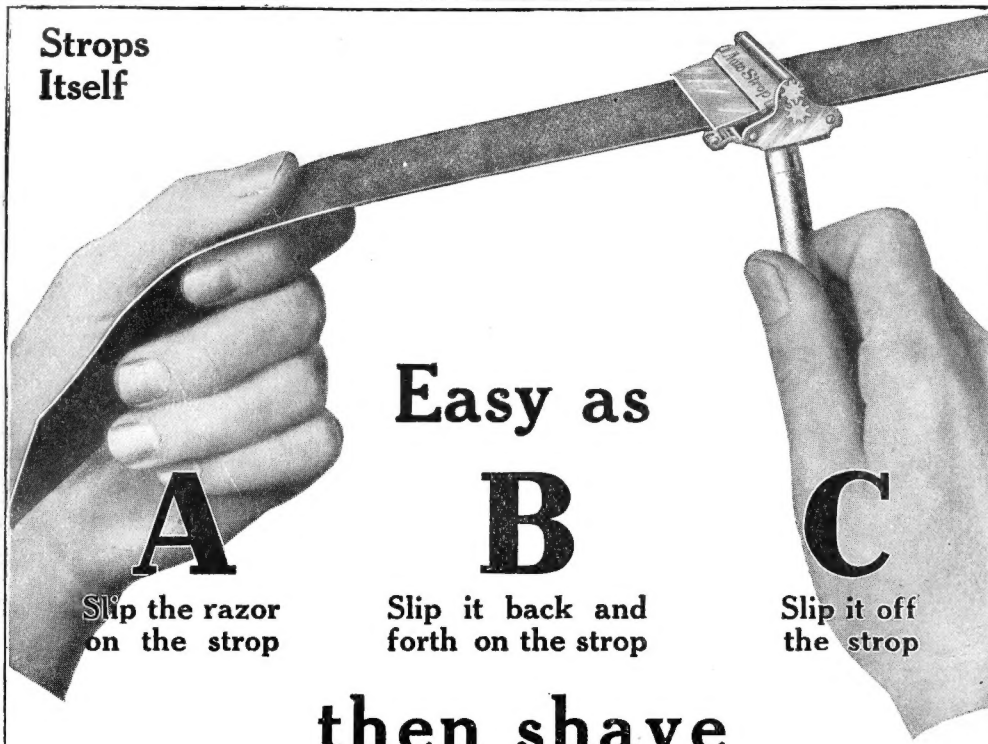

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175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President. RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary. CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer.

Single Copies, 10c.

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By the Year, $1.00

Entered as second class matter, August 24, 1908, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Classified Advertising

In the Munsey Magazines

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$2.50
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THE CAVALIER

Vol. VIII. MAY, 1911. No. 4.

Trouble With the Lid Off.

BY R. K. THOMPSON,

Author of "Too Much of a Good Thing," "A Ringer of Doorbells," "Twelve Good Men," Etc.

Although There May Be Nothing in a Name, Mr. Jones Found There Was a Great Plenty in a Packing-Case Addressed to Him.

(Complete in This Number.)

CHAPTER I.

A SURPRISE PACKAGE.

TO begin at the beginning—

Out at our house there was revelry. Perhaps you can guess the occasion?

A cake with enough candles to make further illumination of the dining-room superfluous; tissue paper and red ribbon littering the floor; and, occupying positions of prominence round the room, a brand-new smoking-jacket and slippers, six volumes of Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes,* and a mahogany cellaret.

A birthday?

Excellent, my dear Watsons!

Mine was the natal day being celebrated—the celebration, at the moment, taking the form of a donkey-party.

We always rig up some such game, Kate and I, to please the kiddies on our birthdays as well as theirs; and I stood in front of a sheet stretched across the closed folding-doors, the center of a shoving, shouting group of children, all struggling for the privilege of tying the handkerchief over my eyes, clowning it for the little ones' benefit right prankfully—when the swinging pantry door flapped to admit the maid.

"Beg pardon, ma'am!"

My wife turned.

"What is it, Agnes?"

"There's a man at the kitchen door with something for Mr. Jones. If you please, it's Mr. Opie, from the station."

I tore the bandage off my mouth and nostrils, where it had slipped down, smothering me.

"The expressman!" I exclaimed. "Have him in, Aggie, at once!"

Then I wheeled on Kate.

"Calling at this hour!" said I. "What do you suppose he's brought?"

Thump! Ker-bump-bump!

Sounds of an object not composed wholly of rubber bouncing over the kitchen floor, and, accompanying the syncopated progress of the object, grunting, as of some one taxed to the limit of endurance.

The pantry door flew open. Staggering

across the threshold came the Spraycliff express - agent, one end of a packing - case against the bottom buttons of his vest, the other end grazing the floor.

"Where'll I—*uff!*—put it, Mr. Jones, sir?"

I stared at the box in his arms. It looked as big as the side of a house. For me—why, it must be a present. A pleased smile lighted up my countenance.

Spent breath whistling a warning of impending collapse in exhausted lungs, the screak of wood slipping through calloused hands, and a shower of vest buttons tinkling on the hardwood trim at the feet of the overburdened figure in the doorway brought me to myself.

"One minute, now, Opie!" I cried. "One minute, and I'll make you a place to set it down!"

Grasping the edge of the table, I shoved it back with a force that all but proved disastrous to the equilibrium of the cake, top-heavy with its candles. Then I kicked a space on the floor clear of the tissue paper, and pointed at the spot.

"There!"

With a crash the box descended on the resting-place I had designated. There was a musical jingle of broken glass from the sideboard as a valued claret pitcher and six tumblers succumbed to the shock, and several fragments of a Royal Bokhara (if not priceless, at least sufficiently priceful), as spray leaves the water under impact of a descending body, were tossed in the air from the box's sharp corners.

"Oh, my rug!"

Kate clasped her hands. Mine I could not restrain rubbing, as I surveyed the packing-case before me, eyed its brave size, considered its promising weight, and tried to conjecture what was inside it. Something pretty fine, it must be!

"I knew it was your birthday, Mr. Jones, sir!" the expressman was saying. "So, as soon as this was dumped offen No. 9 tonight, thinks I, I'll just drive right out to the house in time to be in time for the celebrities, in a manner of speakin'."

A present! Now, who had remembered me so handsomely? That box never weighed an ounce less than two hundred pounds. The express charges alone—

"Three dollars and eighty cents, sir!"

Mr. Opie was holding out his hand. I looked from him to the box. My smile perceptibly lessened.

"Sent collect?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

H-m-m. Queer taste—but, there. Whoever had sent me the box had probably been put out of pocket enough for the gift inside it not to want the additional expense of prepaying the freightage. That was it—I was the recipient of something costly.

With a recurrence of my smile, I fumbled forth my wallet and handed the gray-bloused deliverer of the case his three-eighty. Then, teetering back on my heels, my hands tucked under my coattails, my head cocked on one side, I strove to guess who had sent me the thing.

To save my life, I couldn't think. My family were all accounted for in the presents around the room. There was no friend or acquaintance to whom I had imparted the breath-taking information of my birthday who would be likely to feel in duty bound to give me a token of regard to commemorate the occasion. Who the deuce—

"As I say," Mr. Opie again interrupted, "I thought you might want to have it tonight. I hitched up Bess and drove right out here with it soon as 9 pulled away. 'Course it *was* some trouble; a little unconvenient, in a manner of speakin', but—"

I came to myself with a start.

"And I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," I added, pressing a bill on him without the necessity of violence. "If you care for ice-cream, the girl will give you a plate, and cake, as you pass out through the kitchen."

He paused on the door-sill of the pantry.

"And many returns of the day!"

The door swung to behind him. We were alone with the box.

"Who in the world do you suppose it's from?" Kate asked, the matter of the damaged rug and glassware relegated temporarily to the back of her mind in her curiosity as to the identity of the gift's donor.

She was walking round the case.

"'John Jones,'" she read the address, lettered in bold strokes of lampblack on the cover. "'Spraycliff, New Jersey.'"

Her peripatetic investigation was completed.

"And that's all!" She looked at me.

"There's no sender's name on it anywhere," I nodded. "I can't imagine who sent it."

Taking both hands to it, I lifted one end of the box by a back-straining effort and gently eased it down on the floor again.

"By George, it *is* heavy!" I puffed.

Looking at the thing, I gnawed my mustache. All at once an idea dawned on me.

"I've got it!" And I smacked my hands.

Kate's face was eager.

"What?"

"Uncle Peter Pepperkind!" I cried. "A dollar to a doughnut it's him. He's sent me something. The old codger's remembered me. What do you think of that? Well, well, well!"

My wife drew the receipt for the express fee out of my hand and opened it up. She touched my sleeve.

"'New York,'" she pointed out on the line filled in with the box's sending-place. "It's from New York. Your Uncle Peter lives in Duluth."

I scratched my ear.

"Well, then"—I shook my head—"well, then, I give it up. I can't guess who it's from, to save me!"

Little Wilbur tugged at my hand.

"Papa open bots!" he piped. "Wilbur want see—want see what's inside!"

That boy's only three. Think of him, would you, standing there as wise as a little owl, telling us to do the very thing we should have thought of doing long before. I made a mental note that I had a new one to spring on the fellows at the office in the morning.

Then I put my foot on the buzzer, which the moving of the table had left out on the floor in easy reach.

"Aggie, fetch me the hammer," I ordered, when the maid appeared in answer to the summons. "I'll take the hatchet, too; the ice-pick, and—and anything else that's handy to open this with."

Off came my coat. Up went my sleeves. Grasping the implements which the girl brought me, I made a comic flourish with the hammer that did not fail to provoke the desired signs of joy in my juvenile audience.

"Stand back, now, children!" I commanded. "Schuyler, Alonzo, go out of harm's way over by Wilbur there. We'll see what papa's got. Keep back, everybody!"

I dropped to my knees before the box.

Whoever put it together certainly knew his business, all right. A solid half-hour I worked over it, in the course of my operations bending the ice-pick, nicking the hatchet, and breaking the hammer.

But at last the success which my efforts deserved was won. The cover, with its fringe of weirdly bent nails, came away in a whole piece.

I wiped my brow on the back of my hand.

"Now!" I panted. "Now, then! Now we'll see what we've got here. Come on!"

The children drew up in a curious semicircle around the opposite side of the box. My wife advanced behind me, laying her hand on my shoulder as she leaned forward the better to see what an uncovering of the case revealed.

First, a layer of crumpled newspaper. As I laid hold on this I expected that its removal would disclose the usual underpacking of excelsior, straw, or confetti.

Instead, there was the contents of the box itself.

I nearly dropped with astonishment.

A set of silver. A dozen, a score, a hundred pieces, worth, at the least exaggerated estimate, thousands of dollars.

But if that had been all—

I have said that there was no other wrapping but that wad of newspaper to protect the treasure from the rough sides of the packing-case. In addition to this, the silver had been jammed into the box, bent and twisted and dented out of shape, just about any old way!

CHAPTER II.

WHEN THE BOX WAS OPENED.

I SAT back on my heels, staring at the stuff.

In the flickering light of the forgotten candles on the neglected cake behind me the conglomerate mass of metal in the box gleamed dully.

A bitter laugh escaped my lips.

"Stung!" I remarked. "It's a jolly!"

I felt Kate's hand leave my shoulder. She came round the packing-case and faced me across it.

"A jolly?" she repeated blankly. "A jolly—why, how do you mean?"

"Don't you see?" I snapped.

To tell the truth, I was considerably put out. I had expected a great deal of that box; what I had found in it was a disappointment.

"Somebody knew this was my birthday—somebody with a high sense of humor—and this has been sent to me for a practical joke!"

"But what's the point of it?" she persisted.

"To make me pay the expressage!" I answered. "I've been made cough up three dollars and eighty cents for a lot of worthless tin. *That's* the point of the side-splitting joke—the nub of the rollicking hoax. Now do you understand?"

Silently she plunged her hand into the box and drew out, as I remember it, something that looked like a fruit-dish that a horse had sat on.

A woman who has become proficient in the art—allied to legerdemain—of discovering the mark on her friend's presents, while not appearing to do so, in the instant of hand-to-hand passing, can accomplish the same aim when there is no occasion for going surreptitiously about it with really marvelous swiftness.

She held out the article for my inspection, her finger on a certain spot.

"They aren't stamping that on tin yet!" said she simply.

I looked at the spot indicated.

"Sterling!" I blurted. I scrambled to my feet. "B-but there must be some mistake!" I picked up the cover from the floor, taking a nasty scratch from one of its bent nails unheeded in my haste. "There must be some mistake—"

There was my own name, as plain as lampblack on white pine could make it!

It was as a dash of cold water in the face. Very carefully I laid the cover back beside the box. As in a daze, I passed my hand over my forehead, staring down at the heterogeneous pile of plates and platters and knives and forks heaped in the case.

"Why—why, it's worth a fortune!" I gasped. "Thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of solid silver—the real thing!" I looked at Kate, and our wide glances met. "Who could have sent it to me?"

We aren't acquainted with any millionaires, you know. Commonplace people are all we have association with. There wasn't one I could name that had the means to send me a birthday present worth twice what I earn in a year—

"Why was it packed that way?" my wife broke in, pointing at the jumbled contents of the box.

That was another thing. Supposing anybody crazy enough to bankrupt himself on a birthday gift to me, who would have loaded so gorgeous a set of silver into a box in that idiotic way?

I went down on my knees once more. Pulling out of the tightly wedged mass a candelabra, heavy with arabesques of twined fruit and flowers exquisitely executed, I held it up for inspection. Once the thing must have been of rare beauty, designed to grace some table where banquets would be the rule, not the exception; now it was bent and battered as though trampled under the heel of some unspeakable vandal, twisted into almost unrecognizable shape.

Useless to think that the thing had become damaged to that extent through any rough handling of the box by the expressmen who had relayed it to my home. That was out of the question, too, as the explanation for the battering of the rest of the silver in the box.

There was only one conclusion possible—the stuff had been beaten and bent and twisted as I found it by—whoever had packed it into the case.

Here was a mystery, if you like. Somebody invests a small fortune in a set of solid silver to present me with a token of regard on my birthday, and, guided by some quirk of absolute idiocy, the somebody utterly ruins the gift before it is sent to me.

Ever hear anything like it in your life?

I never did, I'll swear!

I began to take some of the other pieces out of the box. Perhaps, somewhere in or under the mutilated mound of stuff, there might be a note, a card, explaining who the sender was.

Those of the articles which would stand I ranged in a row beside me, laying the others in a growing pile beside the case—when an exclamation from my wife caused me to pause in my task.

I looked up at her. She was staring at the pieces of silver I had arranged in a line, a look of frozen horror on her face. Her bosom rose and fell tumultuously under stress of an emotion whose repression I feared would prove fatal to her bodily well-being.

"Kate—what is it?"

She continued to gaze at the silverware lined up on the floor with glassy eyes fixed in the unwavering stare of one mesmerized.

"Speak, for Heaven's sake!" I cried. "What ails you?"

Her reply startled me. There was little to wonder at in that. The emotion seething within her breast burst from her in a sharp, staccato scream. On its reverberations in

the room, she turned and ran, her skirts gathered high, through the pantry into the kitchen.

A moment and she returned. In her hand was a newspaper. Sweeping the children to her, as she started with them to the door that led up-stairs to the nursery, she thrust the paper into my hands.

"Read that," she said.

Nothing more. She bore the children off; I heard their wailing protest on the stairs at being led to bed so early; I was alone—and feeling miserably lonely—with that box and its unique contents before me, and the paper in my hand.

I looked at it. The date-line on the first page caught my eye; I saw that it was a week old. I guessed that the newspaper was one that had been saved with others to cover the shelves in the kitchen cupboards. What the dickens was the connection between this old sheet and the silver that had come out of that box?

I was not left long in doubt. On the front page, occupying the position of prominence in the first column, was the account of a recent robbery in high society. The mansion of the Stackpooles—the Hermann Stackpooles, of Standard Kerosene fame—had been broken into by a daring burglar who had made a neat haul and got clean away.

There was a list of the stolen goods. I read half-way down the itemized account. Next minute the newspaper was propped up against the side of the packing-case. I was digging the silver out of the box with the frenzied haste of a hungry dog going after a bone.

Piece after piece as I brought it to light and compared it with a line in the itemized description of the articles missing from the Stackpoole home sent my heart farther and farther toward my shoes with trip-hammer strokes of despair. Any glimmering doubts that I may have had of the truth of my comparisons were snuffed out in the presence, on every one of the articles which that box disgorged, of the well-known Stackpoole crest.

"Well?"

I bounded to my feet with a guilty start. Two pieces of silver which I held in my hand dropped clattering to the floor as I sprang back, cowering in dread of the imminent touch on my shoulder of the law's long arm. My wife confronted me from the doorway.

"It's it," I nodded to her.

She stepped into the room. Carefully she closed the door behind her, then stood, hesitating. "I shut the door of the nursery, too," she mused, "but—" With a desperate shrug she advanced. "You're sure—" and she looked with meaning at the silverware strewing the floor.

Again I nodded.

"There's even the Stackpoole crest," I began.

"*Sh-h!*"

Finger on lips, she tiptoed to the pantry door. She listened, applied her eye to the crack, and, finally, flung the portal wide. The kitchen was empty. Agnes had gone either to her room or out for a walk.

Satisfied, Kate came back.

"Why is this—this loot sent to you?"

Her eyes swept the half-emptied box, then fastened themselves on me with gimlet-like properties.

Gad, I was thinking the same thing myself. This was the Stackpoole plate. Of that there could be no doubt. A burglar had risked his liberty, if not his life, to steal the stuff. He had got clean away with the swag.

By golly, he had packed it up in a stout, pine box and sent it to me!

"Is there any way you can explain it?"

Kate continued to bore me through and through with her steady eyes. Something in her tone, taken with that steely stare, caused me to change color. Was it possible—did my wife doubt me? Did she think that all I had told her of my past life was false, that somewhere, some time, I had known desperate criminals, been one of them, in fact?

"Now, look here!" I blurted. "I don't know anything about this, any more than you do. It beats me why a burglar should want to give away the proceeds of a successful robbery at all. And I'll go down in writing that I can't make head nor tail of why he should pick me out—me, of all people—to receive his spoils."

The thing in its true light dawned on me.

"This is the limit!" I continued, with gathering excitement. "Here I am, a decent married man, the father of a family, the respected member of a respectable community, and—and a thief makes me a fence; sends me his stolen goods. Why, I never—never heard of such a thing! It's past belief! I must be dreaming, that's all!"

I looked round me. There was the box with the cover off. Half on the floor and half in the packing-case was seven or eight thousand dollars' worth of solid silver. It bore the Stackpoole coat-of-arms. It was certainly the stolen stuff that I had just read of in the paper.

"And it was sent to you; there's no mistake about that," Kate, following her own train of thought, bumped into mine. "'John Jones,'" she read the address on the cover, a finger tapping her white teeth, "'John Jones—John Jones.'"

The reiteration made me cross.

"Oh, it's a common enough name!" I said.

My wife gave a violent start

"Wait!" she cried.

I waited.

"I believe I begin to see a light," she said slowly.

"My hat off to you, then," I bowed.

"What—what would you say," she hesitated, "if I told you that this box wasn't sent to you at all?"

I looked at her.

"I'd say you were crazy!" I blurted.

"Well, I'm not!"

"What—look here!" I pointed at the cover. "Didn't you just read my name on that? Isn't it plain enough for anybody to see. That is my name, isn't it?"

"No, John," she said sweetly, "it is not!"

My jaw dropped.

"Well—"

"If you'll please keep quiet for thirty seconds," she put in, "perhaps I can explain this whole thing."

CHAPTER III.

A DANGEROUS SITUATION.

"SUPPOSE," said my wife, "that the Stackpoole burglar was being pursued by the police?"

"A likely supposition," I nodded.

"Suppose he couldn't move round with his stolen goods to hamper him?"

I looked at the silverware. Its weight could be estimated at a couple of hundred pounds, roughly and without fear of exaggeration.

"Go on," I said.

"Well, he wants to get rid of the loot for a time. He must send it to somebody he can trust to keep it for him till he has shaken the detectives, or the police, off his trail. And there is nobody he can trust—"

"There's me," I broke in. "Good, old reliable Jonesy, the burglars' friend and safe depository for all proceeds of crime, big or little. I'm so well-known, you see, in the underworld. Naturally my name occurs to him in a flash of inspiration. So he sends the box to me—"

"When you are quite through being silly," Kate suggested coldly.

"Pardon the interruption," I remarked. "Continue."

"There is nobody, as I say, that the burglar can trust to keep the silver for him. What is he going to do to be rid of it for a while? Always remembering that he wants the assurance of being able to get it back again? I think this is the idea that occurred to him.

"Packing the silverware in this box, he sent it by express to—mark this—*a* John Jones. That isn't your name on the cover. It isn't anybody's name. It's a name the robber made up out of his own head. Don't you see his scheme?

"He was going to send the box by express to somebody he didn't think existed in a near-by town. He figured that it would be impossible for the box to be delivered. What do express companies usually do with packages that cannot be delivered? They keep them, subject to the sender's call, for thirty days.

"Some time during those same thirty days, the thief who stole the Stackpoole plate expected to shake the officers of the law off his track. He meant to go to the express office here and claim his box back.

"It would be an easy matter to explain that he had made a mistake in addressing it; he would have his receipt to show that he was the original owner of the package, and there would be no trouble in reclaiming it. Do you see?"

"I see this," I answered. "Providing your diagnosis of the case is right, and the burglar did as you think, why did I get this box? Doesn't what I mean strike you? There are two other Joneses living here in Spraycliff—two other families of the same name as mine. Why didn't the package go to one of them instead of coming to me?"

She held up an impressive finger.

"That," said she, "is the strangest coincidence of all. To-night is your birthday."

I rubbed my chin reflectively.

"You mean Opie jumped to the conclu-

sion that this box was meant for me," I said, "because he knew it was my birthday, and thought it was a present?"

"Exactly," she nodded. "And because it was your birthday, you were willing to pay the express charges. Nobody else would have done that. It was probably what the burglar took into account as the strongest safeguard he had against a living John Jones actually receiving the package—that nobody would pay out three dollars and eighty cents for a box, as I've heard you say, 'in the dark.'"

I was rubbing my chin harder than ever.

"You know," I hesitated, "you know, I think you may be right about this. The fact is"—I threw up my hands—"why, of course you're right! It's the only explanation. It must be right!"

Kate nodded.

"I think I am," she said.

There was a pause.

"And now what is that crook going to do when he finds out that his scheme has miscarried—that somebody's got his box?" I asked.

"That," said my wife, "is just what I've been thinking."

I eyed her somewhat furtively.

"I'd give something to see his face when he calls at the express office," I hazarded. Accompanying the remark I let slip a chuckle which could scarcely have fooled my own children as to its genuine mirth.

"I wouldn't!" snapped Kate.

"Why — er, the joke's on him, you know!" I said.

"I don't know anything of the kind!" she caught me up. "If there's anything resembling a joke in this whole wretched affair, I think it's distinctly on us!"

"What do you mean?" I asked—though I knew perfectly well.

"What do you suppose that thief will do when he discovers, as of course he will, that his box has been delivered to a really-truly John Jones?" she demanded. "Immediately he'll find out where John Jones lives, and then he'll come at once to get his property back."

"He might miss us," I suggested, "by looking up the two other Joneses here in town."

"Mr. Opie will tell him who the Jones was that got the box," Kate reassured me. "He'll find us, all right, don't worry!"

"But you don't think he'd dare walk in on us and claim the stolen goods?"

"I most certainly do!"

"Why, he wouldn't have the cheek, the concentrated gall—"

"You'll see."

"We could arrest him the minute he rang the door-bell."

"Door-bell?" She stared at me. "*Door-bell?*" Her hands went up in awe of my seeming stupidity. "Don't you understand that when he comes to get back his box he'll take it the same way that it first got into his hands—by burglary?"

There! The cat was out of the bag. So Kate feared the same thing of which I was in dread. But I must try to soothe her alarm.

"Oh, come now!" I cried. "Come now—he wouldn't dare do anything as desperate as that!"

"He wouldn't?" said she. "He was desperate enough to rob the Stackpooles, wasn't he? Compare their house with ours. A great, big mansion, surrounded by all sorts of the latest appliances in burglar-alarms, with dozens of servants round and a private watchman probably on duty. If he broke in there, why wouldn't he risk burglaring our frail house—no harder to assault, figuratively, than a chicken-coop?"

"But we'll fool him!" I exclaimed. "We'll put the kibosh on any attempt to maraud us. We'll pack this silver up again and send it straight back to the original owners. And then, when the crook calls, he'll find what he's after is gone."

My wife advanced a step toward me.

"Are you mad," she fairly whispered, "to suggest such a thing?"

"Why?" I asked.

"Think! What would happen if that criminal went to the trouble of breaking into this house only to find his precious swag missing? Do you know what inference he would take from that? Knowing we had the box at one time, and not finding it when he came, he would think we had appropriated the silver for our own profit."

"And?" I suggested.

"Oh, don't you see?" she cried, agony in face and voice. "He'd be furious, wild, thrown into a towering rage. And—and he'd kill us all in our beds!"

I mopped my brow.

"But what do you want to do?" I inquired. "Keep the stuff here till the thief calls for it? You can't go quite as far as that, you know—turning over to a burglar

the property of somebody else. It would be participating in a crime."

Distraught, she sat down on the edge of the box. From contact with the contaminating case she sprang up instantly with a shudder of revulsion. Ruefully she turned over with the toe of her shoe a bent and twisted bread-tray that lay on the floor.

"That this should ever happen to us!" she choked. "The shame of it—the lasting shame to the children if it ever got out that our house—our house, mind you—was made the repository for stolen goods? Oh, it's frightful!"

I gathered myself together.

"Well, it's not our fault," I remarked.

She was silent.

"We can't help it if the most peculiar set of circumstances on record has saddled us with the proceeds of a robbery. Certainly anybody would understand that. The neighbors—"

"Did you ever hear of a neighbor understanding anything right?" she asked. "I never did!"

I shrugged.

"Well, they'll have to this time," I declared. "Anybody that chooses to think anything about us having this box under our roof for a matter of eighteen hours or less, can do so and be hanged to 'em. But, I dare say, when we send the thing back to the Stackpooles to-morrow—"

Kate set her lips with the air of one making up a mind already persuaded in a certain direction.

"We aren't going to send that box back to them!" she announced. "Positively, absolutely, finally, and beyond argument we—are—not! Now, that settles it!"

"Come now, Kate!" I pleaded. "Listen to reason. You can't keep those people from their own goods to turn 'em over to a burglar. That's—oh, it's absurd!"

"Do you want to be murdered in your sleep?" she demanded. "Do you want to wake up murdered to find me dead beside you? Would you have us both slaughtered in cold blood by an infuriated thief, and then find that our children had been killed, too?"

"But, look here!" I cried. "The stuff belongs to those people. They're looking for it. They want it. We've got it. We've got to turn it over."

"The Stackpooles are wealthy," she argued. "They wouldn't mind losing a little bit of silver."

"Little bit," I began, looking around at the mass of precious merchandise that had come out of the box.

"What's three or four thousand dollars' worth of it in the eyes of people who have their money stacked away in bales?" she persisted. "Listen! Have they offered any reward for the return of their property?"

"Not that I know of, but—"

"Then, there you are! That proves they aren't upset over their loss. As you just said, we aren't to blame for receiving this stuff. If the burglar who stole it hadn't been the victim of circumstances in having his box go astray, would the silver have ever got out of his hands? Of course it wouldn't. Then who are we to interfere—why do we need to sacrifice ourselves to restore the property of people we've never seen—people, most likely, who would snub us if we ever did meet them?"

"Kate, you're talking like a maniac," I told her.

"I know it!" she agreed. "But I am mad where the safety of myself and the children and you is concerned. I'd do anything to ward off harm from us all. And I tell you that that box must be here when the burglar comes to get it!"

She paused for breath.

"The thing's been delivered into our keeping unasked and unwanted," she went on. "We'll just let it be taken away without resistance. That's the safest way to do. It's the only sensible course open to us."

I want to say a word in my wife's behalf. She was really sincere in her dread of that burglar climbing into our house some morning and flying into a murderous rage should the loot he had tracked to our door be gone.

If there be those who question her ethical sense in wishing to let the property of somebody else go into the hands of a criminal, I would suggest that they withhold their judgment till they are placed in something like the same position.

For myself, I began to see that her way was really the best after all. She talked to me half that night. And in the end I agreed that, since it was none of our affair that the box had come to us in the first place, and a matter of little account to the Stackpooles whether they ever got their silver back or not, we would be wise in letting the box depart in the custody of the person who had sent it.

Repacking the silver in the case, and

nailing the cover over it again, together we pushed the dining-room table back in its place, concealing the box beneath it.

I listened to her assurances that she would take the children in hand on the morrow and instruct them never to let drop so much as a hint of what they had seen inside that packing-case when it was opened before them.

Then we went over the house before going to bed.

Our customary procedure was reversed this night. Instead of locking the windows and bolting the doors, we raised each casement and set each portal on the jar—making it of the utmost convenience to any one so desiring to enter the house back or front.

It was the intention to give the burglar whose visit we expected as little trouble as possible in recovering his ill-gotten gains. And, there being no telling what time he would call, it was just as well to prepare for his reception at once.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURGLAR ARRIVES.

THREE days dragged by.

And when I say "dragged" I ask you to believe that I know the meaning of the word to the final synonym of its definition.

Have you, dear reader, ever waited through three long nights for the arrival of a burglar? One whom you were reasonably sure means to pay you a nocturnal visit? If you have, then you know it is not the most pleasant of the indoor sports, not by a large number of points.

Each night of the three that followed my birthday, my wife and I put the children to bed and then made our regular journey through the house, opening the windows, unbolting the doors, and setting the front gate off the latch before retiring ourselves.

Naturally, sleep, except in the most broken spells, was a stranger to our couch. Creaking of boards, rattling of loose window-panes, and the like, which even the most timid of wakeful mortals can put out of mind as the stirrings of burglarious visitants, my wife and I imagined to be the movements at last of the thief in our home.

Through the long watches of the night we lay shivering under the sheets, fearing lest the robber, once in the house, might miss the hiding-place of the box and come up-stairs bent on venting his baffled rage upon us.

The dining-room table we shoved back to the wall after the first night, leaving the packing-case standing out in the center of the floor where none but a man without eyes or of cast-iron shins could have escaped discovering it.

I suggested, in a frivolous moment, red-lanterns on all four corners; but my spouse received the remark in the disgusted silence it merited, and that was my final attempt to wring any element of humor out of the situation.

I forbore even to voice the jocular comments which rose in my mind on finding, the second morning after we left the house open, a collection of stray cats and dogs whose occupancy of the parlor as a lodging-place that night had ruined forever six chairs and a sofa, once upholstered in delicate, pastel shades, now caked with mud beyond repair.

It was this, however, that impersonated the last straw.

"This can't go on," I informed Kate. "That burglar hasn't found out his box isn't at the express office. He hasn't called there yet. Goodness knows when he will get on the job of breaking open our house. But goodness is also perfectly well aware that I hope it's soon!"

"We'll just have to be patient," said she.

"We'll both be worried into our graves, if this keeps up a week longer," I retorted, "and you know it!"

"But what is there to do?"

I gnawed my mustache.

"All I can see is that we'll simply have to wait," she went on. "I don't know any way that we can notify the thief that his box has been delivered. And, unless he learns of it—"

"That's it!" I broke in.

She stared at me.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we'll let the burglar know we've got his triply sacred loot!" I answered. "We'll let him know that his plan has miscarried."

Kate's brows met in a frown.

"I thought," said she, "you didn't know who the thief was? And, if you don't know him, I don't see how you can tell him anything—"

"There is a wonderful medium," I explained, "that accomplishes wonders while you sleep. Let us pray that it will bring

to pass such a miracle that we'll be able to slumber soon. The medium to which I refer is—advertising."

"Ad—"

"You heard me the first time," I nodded. "That's the ticket. I'm sorry I didn't think of it before. We'll advertise that we've got Mr. Burglar's box, and request him to come and get it just as soon as press of other business will allow."

"But how can you get an advertisement to reach him?" she hesitated.

"The daily paper—"

"Which one? There are a dozen. He might miss reading the advertisement if you had it in any of the newspapers he didn't take. In order to make sure of him seeing it, you'd have to advertise in all, and that would cost a fearful lot of money."

"Here's a way round," I said. "There's one particular periodical he's certain to read. They all do—all crooks, second-story workers, pickpockets, etc. I mean that pink-covered sheet with the funny pictures, side and front, of the newest captures in the field of crime, *The Police News*."

We were finished breakfast and I put on my coat preparatory to the daily dash for the eight-ten, city bound.

"On my way up to the office I pass right by the printing-place where they get out that journal," said I, "and I'll stop in and leave my notice in time to catch the next issue."

With a kiss, I tapped Kate's shoulder.

"Cheer up, old girl!" I cried. "Our troubles will soon be over. See if they aren't!"

With that I took it on the run.

Arrived in town, I dropped in at the office of the periodical and found, to my pleased surprise, that any advertisement I desired to leave would have to be handed in at once, the next issue being ready to go to press that very day.

I chewed a pen-handle to a pulp at a desk in a dusty corner of the office, and finally evolved this:

Box sent to John Jones, Spraycliff, N. J., delivered. Call for same at once and oblige. Urgent!

Whatever the criminals or the police who read that thought when it appeared in print two days later I don't know. I tried to make it vague enough so that the wrong pair of eyes directed at the somewhat cabalistic words would be in the dark as to the meaning implied.

And, at the same time, I had hopes that it would strike the sight of the crook for whom it was intended as a clarion-call to be up and doing—and that without delay.

Yet the latter purpose seemed to have been missed as the days went by and still no burglar appeared at my house, either by broad daylight or in the still of night. We continued to lie awake from midnight to morning, waiting with nerves on edge for the coming of the marauder, every entrance wide open in expectation of his call.

All in vain.

Saturday afternoon — the fourth day after the advertisement appeared—I was sitting with my wife on our front porch, nodding in my chair and about ready to subside into a coma superinduced by the preceding siege of sleeplessness which would not lift for many hours, when Kate shook my arm.

"John!" she hissed in my ear. "John, wake up!"

"*Hanh?*"—I roused with a start.

"Don't you see that man down there at the gate?" she said, calmly going on with her sewing. "He's been standing there, looking up at us, for a good three minutes. Go down and see what he wants."

I rose, yawned, and sauntered down the short stretch of gravel path. At the gate stood a sandy-haired man of medium height, dressed in clothes of a character best described as Sunday-best. He put up a nervous hand to his straggly beard as I approached.

"Good afternoon," said I. "What can I do—"

I stopped. The man's eyes met mine, shifted to the ground, roved over the front of the house, and then fastened themselves on his feet. The cause of his apparent embarrassment struck me with the blinding light of inspiration.

"G-good aft'noon," he stammered, twisting his hands. "Do you—that is, I meant to say you—you don't want a man to—to hire for anything, do you?"

I wet my lips.

"W-what's that?" I faltered in a cracked voice.

"D-do you—would you want to hire a gardener, or — or something round your place?"

I caught hold of the gate. With trembling eagerness I pulled it open.

"Come in!" I invited hoarsely. "C-come right in!"

Up the path I led him, round the side of the house, in through the kitchen and toward the back stairs. Still in the lead, I mounted to the third floor. I threw open the door of our guest-room.

"This will be yours," I said. "I—I hope you'll be comfortable. If there—there's anything you want, w-why don't hesitate to ask for it. Will you?"

His shifty eyes swept over me, then settled on the floor.

"N-no, sir!" he stammered. A red wave mantled such of his face as was unhidden by the straggling beard. "T-thank you very much, sir."

"Not at all!" I answered, backing toward the door.

I felt the doorsill under my feet.

"I'll just run down-stairs for a moment," I apologized. "You're sure you'll be comfortable?"

He swallowed over a dryness in his throat that had a counterpart in mine, nodding.

Appearing on the porch, I dropped down in the chair beside Kate. With a shaking hand I mopped my face. She looked at me.

"Well?" said she. "Where's the man?"

I cleared my throat.

"Up-stairs," said I. "In the guest's room."

"That strange-looking person in my guest's room — why, I won't have him there!" Kate cried, half rising from her seat.

I pushed her back.

"It's all right," said I. "I've just hired him. He's the—what was it? Oh, yes. He's the gardener."

"John!"—my wife stared at me. "We haven't any garden. How can you hire a gardener when there isn't a—"

"Don't you suppose he could see we're gardenless?" I interrupted. "Yet that was the position he asked me for—a gardener. Why, do you suppose?" Kate was silent. Women are so stupid when it comes to penetrating disguises! I leaned forward. "It's the burglar!" I said.

CHAPTER V.

A LULL.

NOT a moment too soon I clapped my hand over Kate's mouth, checking her scream in mid utterance.

"For Heaven's sake," I muttered, "don't do that!"

I strained an ear to make out whether the fragment of her startled exclamation had leaked to the room above. All was still. Then all was well.

"Do you want to spoil everything?" I stage-whispered.

She subsided and I took my hand away.

"Are you sure it's him?" she asked.

"Positive."

"He admitted he was—"

"Certainly not!" I answered promptly. "Give him credit for more sense. He's not taking any chances."

"Chances—chances of what?"

I sighed.

"My dear, haven't you any idea of the way criminals go about things?" I asked wearily. "The man has appeared in disguise. He applied for the position of gardener—the first thing that popped into his head, I could tell that plainly—because he wanted to get into our house to see the lay of the land.

"How does he know but what that advertisement was only a trap to get him down here and into the hands of the police? He isn't going to make a move that will betray him till he's certain we're not aiming to have him arrested. That's all—it's perfectly natural."

"It's absolutely unnecessary!" my wife declared, sitting up. "He's here. So is his hateful box. All he's got to do is to take it away."

"Softly, softly!" I said with a knowing nod. "All in good time!"

"I do wish you'd drop that patronizing air—it's abominable!" said she. "If that man came after his box, why can't he take it and have done, instead of fooling around, pretending to be gardeners, and the like?"

"Only one gardener," I reminded her. "That's all he's pretending to be, you know."

She made a gesture of impatience.

"Well, that's enough!" she remarked. "I think he must be a fool!"

"There," I announced, "I don't agree with you. I admire his caution. It shows he's a true artist at his profession. Put yourself in his place. Would you come into a strange house and run the risk of being caught by the police, all because you didn't take the ounce of precaution that's worth a pound of—"

"You go tell him it's all right!" and Kate straightened her shoulders. "Tell him we won't betray him; we know who he

is, and all that, and all we want him to do is to get his box away as quickly as possible—if necessary, you'll help him cart it off!"

I crossed my legs.

To tell the plain, unvarnished truth, I was afraid to approach that burglar and speak out as she suggested. It had given me a distinctly unpleasant feeling to come face to face with a real, live crook for the first time in my life, out there at the gate. All the time I had been with him I had had chills running up my spine.

The thought of confronting the thief and blurting out that I knew him to be a robber caused me sensations of acute timidity. How did I know he wouldn't take offense if I informed him that I was aware of his vocation? You can't call a burglar a burglar the way you can throw the bricklayer trade up to a mason, you know. In this case, it might sound like a denunciation.

These second-story men and porch-climbers carry vicious guns that aren't far from a position of easy unlimbering. I wouldn't exactly hanker after the novel experience of being shot.

"No, Kate," and I shook my head, "the thing to do is to wait. Wait till he's satisfied that everything's as it should be, that he runs no danger, and then—then he'll take his box fast enough, make up your mind to it!"

"Well, it's the foolishest way of doing anything I ever heard of!" said she.

"Read the classics," said I, "Old Sleuth, Holmes, and the rest. Then you'll understand how these things are done."

Honestly, I expected that the burglar would clear out with the box when night came. I was satisfied to have him hang around the house for the rest of that day. I didn't begrudge him the dinner he ate in the kitchen with the maid—that part was all right and according to Doyle.

But—night passed, and there he was still hanging round next morning!

"Just wait," I told my wife, frowning a little to myself. "He isn't quite certain it's all right yet. A little cautious still, you see. But he'll be reassured presently."

"Yes," said she, "I should think he would tumble pretty soon that we aren't going to harass him to any extent. Even the thick skull of a burglar ought to absorb that fact after a time."

"Take his side of the case," I argued. "It means more to him than it does to us. He's playing with his life and liberty while he's under this roof, so he thinks. Bear that in mind."

"I'll try to consider his feelings, John," said Kate with early Christian humility.

That day slipped by. Bright and early the next morning I was up and whistling a scrap of an old song as I set about preparations for shaving.

"You are gay," suggested my wife in a dragged-out voice.

"As a meadow lark!" I beamed at her. "The box has gone."

"Humph!" said she.

"No?" I faltered, my face falling. "No?"

She beckoned me to the window of our bedroom. I looked out and down—at the burglar, sitting on the bench beside the kitchen door, waiting for breakfast!

"I thought sure he'd grab her last night!" I muttered, withdrawing my head. "Blamed if I know why he didn't."

"How long are you going to keep this up?" asked my wife.

I lathered my face.

"I'll go down," I answered, "and speak to him about it this morning. In a roundabout way I'll sort of suggest, in a subtle manner, you know, without saying anything right out—"

"If it were me," said she, "I'd take him into that dining-room, pack the box on his back, and march him to the head of the street with it as fast as ever I could. But I suppose," she finished with a deprecating smile, "when he does go, some time in the fall of 1942, you'll provide a flag-draped automobile for the box and an escort of the High School Fife and Drum Corps to attend the departure."

"I'll go right down now," I hastened to placate her, struggling into my coat.

Passing through the kitchen, I appeared beside the man on the bench, unheard above the rattling of pots and pans that heralded the near arrival of the morning meal in the adjacent room.

"*Humph! A-hum!*"

As I cleared my throat, the burglar sprang up. He wheeled to face me, and his countenance reddened violently, his hands groped together and twisted nervously—once more the signs of confusion which attended our every meeting were apparent.

"Good morning!" I began.

He choked over the response:

"G-good morning, sir!"

He called me "sir"! Was it possible?

Did I have him terrorized to the point of servility? Perhaps my earlier fear of him had been ungrounded.

I attempted a stern frown.

"I've had my eye on you since Saturday —er—"

"Weepin," he supplied meekly. "They call me Weepin, sir."

"Weepin, yes," I continued, my voice gathering in strength. "As I say, I've been watching you since you — ah — came here three days ago. Well? You haven't done anything yet."

His eyes met mine, then wandered, as was their shifty habit, to about seven different objects that were near before dropping to the ground.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" I snapped.

The next minute I wished I had the words back. He threw up his head and looked me full in the face. There was a sudden set to his jaw under the straggly beard that I had not noticed there before.

"What d'ye mean?" he growled, his head settling into his coat collar, his eyes boring me through.

I thought I saw his hand start toward his jacket-pocket. Almost with a spring I drew back.

"I mean—I mean," I stammered; "what I meant to say was what have you got to say for yourself about my place here? What do you think of it? Does it meet vour fancy, this small home of mine?"

"It's all right," he grated.

"Thank you!" I breathed fervently. "I take that as a compliment, really. Coming from you, it is praise, indeed. You've seen so many country places in the course of your profession—"

I stopped, horrified.

"Ah—as—as a gardener, of course!" I blurted. "That was what I meant. You've seen the beautiful homes of the country from the outside, purely. Never from the inside, naturally. That's understood, eh?"

He continued to stare at me.

"It's all right," he said.

I bowed.

"Thank you—"

Then I remembered myself too late.

"As I was saying," I remarked as stiffly as I could, "I wanted to get your opinion on my place. We think it's rather neat. Just room for our small family, and that's all. We—we don't do much entertaining. A guest is rather more than we can comfortably take care of at present. Not that I want to hurry you—"

I broke off. From the kitchen behind us floated the voice of Agnes lifted in a song of her native Killarney. The blood froze in my veins as the burglar shot his hand to his coat pocket—

But what he drew out was a handkerchief, which he applied to a brow that was suddenly dewed with sweat.

The manner which accompanied his next words was an additional surprise. The tightness of his jaw relaxed; his eyes, with their baleful glare, left mine and sought the toes of his shoes. Literally, he seemed to shrink a full inch and more before me.

"I hope, sir," he whined, "you won't regret lettin' me come here. I'm werry, werry grateful to you for it. If there's anything you want done at any time—"

"Much obliged!" I interrupted curtly. As his attitude had altered, so had mine gone back to its previous pitch. "There won't be anything after you attend to this one small matter. We'll be square when that's done."

His eyes flashed into mine.

"And what might that be, sir?"

I bit my lip. His soft tone did not fool me. Probably he was just waiting for me to come out flatfooted with a mention of that silver and then put a bullet in me.

"I want you to do what you came here for," I said. "That's all."

"Yes, sir."

I edged to the kitchen door.

"And, as you've been here since Saturday," I added, "I think it's about time for you to get busy—now!"

He bowed his head.

"Yes, sir," he repeated. "I will right away."

"You mean," I asked eagerly, "that you're ready at last?"

He flushed.

"I'll set about it," he nodded, "this very day, sir!"

I piled up the stairs to break the good news to Kate.

CHAPTER VI.

QUEER PERFORMANCES.

I HEARD about it when I got home that night.

"He went down-town this morning about an hour after you left," my wife re-

lated. "Where he got the wheelbarrow, I don't know; but up Spruce Avenue he came, trundling it along, simply loaded down with the biggest bunch of seeds and bulbs and plants I've ever laid eyes on.

"When I asked him where he got them, he told me at Hoog's, the garden-seed store. Well, I flew to the phone and called them up. Yes, they told me, Mr. Jones's *gardener* had been there and ordered *twenty-seven dollars'* worth of stuff *charged!*"

"Tormented tomcats!" I roared.

"Oh, wait!" Kate went on. "That's not all. Before I could find out what he was doing and stop him, he had got a hand-plow from somewhere—another mysterious acquisition—and our entire lawn, as you missed seeing by coming up Ashtree Avenue from the cars and in at the back way, is hacked into ruins!"

"Let me see!" I gasped.

I ran to the front porch and looked out over what had once been one of the neatest, the most strikingly attractive and, at the same time, expensive clover lawns in all Spraycliff. What was this that was revealed to my anguished eye in its place?

The Bad Lands of Arizona before the coming of irrigation? Kansas after a cyclone? Not a blade of grass, a spot of green, anywhere. Nothing but dirt; ugly, commonplace, fresh-turned earth—that, and nothing more, from fence to porch-step!

I could have wept. Additionally, I felt myself the man to rend limb from limb with my own two hands the vandal who had thus despoiled my most cherished possession, the apple of my eye, my beautiful, beautiful lawn.

And there was the fiend in human form who had done it! Crouching on his knees in the furrowed soil down by the gate was the burglar, planting some of that twenty-seven dollars' worth of seeds and bulbs into the sacred ground he had despoiled.

The wretch! The double-dyed villain! The—the knave—

Weaker grew my invective as I watched him. Gradually the anger stole out of my breast as soreness leaves a bruise. I began to forgive him the destruction of my lawn. Even the matter of the twenty-seven dollars that was due to come out of my pocket into that of Hoog's, on the first of the month, ceased to rankle in my mind.

Within the house I heard the phone-bell ring. The maid appeared in the doorway behind my wife and me, and there was a whispered colloquy, which terminated in a touch on my sleeve.

"Thorpe & Son, hardware," said Kate. "They just called up to say that the plow and the wheelbarrow, which your gardener charged to our account this morning, was put on memorandum with a slight mistake. Instead of being fourteen dollars for the two, it should have been sixteen!"

Even this did not check the warm glow that was permeating the region of my heart as I continued to look at the bent figure so industriously sowing my front yard with those almost priceless seeds.

Drawing my wife to me, I pointed at him.

"Dear," I said gently, "I have forgiven him for it all."

"I know," Kate nodded. "You've simply got to grin and bear it, keep still, and stand for it. You can't repudiate the purchases he made. If you did, you'd have to explain that he wasn't a gardener at all. And that would cause considerable surprise at our reason for having him around the house."

I shook my head.

"It's not that," I said. "I want you to look. You see what he's doing?"

She drew away from me sharply.

"See!" she exclaimed. "Do you think I'm blind?"

"There, before you," I went on in a hushed voice, "is an example of man's gratitude. Never let a word be spoken in my presence again that attacks that trait in human character. It exists. Do you understand the impulse which has prompted that fellow to do that?"

"Cussedness," she slowly nodded. "It's the only thing I can think of—inborn, unholy cussedness!"

"You are wrong," I answered. "Let me explain his real purpose. He has promised to take that box away to-night. But before he goes he wants to repay me for its safekeeping. He sees I have no garden. Once, in the happy days when he was free from crime, he has been a gardener. Triumphant thought—he will build me a garden.

"Don't you see? He means it to be a token—a monument left behind to remind us that somewhere, roaming paths of sin, perhaps, there lives a man who appreciates our honesty, who has shown his appreciation by performing a little task of sincere gratitude. That is his idea. And, rascal that he is, I honor him for it. To my mind, at this minute, you stand before what is one

of the prettiest bits of sentiment I have ever seen or heard of in my life!"

Stupidly Kate stared at me.

"Don't you agree with me?" I asked.

She looked at me pityingly.

"Yes, dear," she said, her voice soothing.

"We'll take care of the garden after he's gone," I went on; "won't we?"

"Yes, dear." Anything-to-humor-him was her tone.

I turned on my heel.

"I'm not crazy!" I snapped. "And I really do think he's trying to repay us for holding the box."

Kate came to herself.

"Well," said she, "if the last part of your remark is true, the first of it's wrong. That's all."

That ended the discussion.

As I tossed myself on my bed that night, I closed my eyes with a feeling of relief, secure in the knowledge that by the morrow box, burglar, and all would be gone—gone for good, our worry at an end.

I was finely fooled.

The next morning there sat the crook, the same as ever, perched on the bench beside the kitchen-door. It took two looks out of my bedroom window to convince myself that I wasn't the victim of a nightmare.

Then I confronted Kate with open mouth.

"Not—not gone yet!" I gasped.

She gave me a crooked smile.

"Staying over another day or two," she suggested, "to perfect that monument to his gratitude, I dare say."

"Perhaps that's it," I muttered.

"No, it isn't!"

My wife stepped toward me.

"I'll tell you what it is," said she. "I wasn't sure of it before, but now I'm almost positive. He doesn't intend to leave. He's found an attraction here that's keeping him. It's Agnes—he's fallen in love with her!"

"Kate!" I drew back. "You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. Listen. Last evening he met her at the corner, and they went walking. The same thing the night before. And the one before that. What's he doing this minute? Hanging round the kitchen. You can see that; and there's a lot of things you *don't* see while you're away at the office and I'm here alone. I know I'm right about this!"

"But—but we can't have anything like that, you know!" I cried. "That's out of the question entirely. If he's in love with the servant-girl, he's not paying attention to getting that box off our hands."

She nodded.

"That's it. That's what's been holding him back all the time."

"This is bad!" I shook my head. "Bad—bad!"

"Decidedly bad," agreed Kate.

I fell to pacing the floor.

"First thing you know," I began. Then I stopped. I stared at my wife with gathering awe. "What's to prevent that girl taking hold on him so strong that—that she'll reform him?" I blurted.

My wife fingered her lip.

"Stranger things have happened," she mused.

"But nothing worse could happen to us!" I exclaimed. "Think what it would mean!"

"He'd forsake his profession of burglary," she nodded.

"Cut out crime in all its branches!" I added.

"Turn his back for good on his evil ways," put in Kate.

I took my head in my hands.

"And leave us up a tree!" I exploded.

Contemplation of this side of the question was awful. Positively, without that burglar we were lost—lost! Unless he relieved us of his box, we would be saddled with it forever. Impossible to think of returning it to the Stackpooles. They would want to know how it came in our possession, and—was it thinkable that our story would be believed? Never in the wide world!

No use talking. That robber had got us in for this. Now he had to stand by and get us out of it. I brought my fist down on the top of the bureau.

"Kate!"

I was looking at my wife's reflection in the mirror.

"Yes?"

"I know it's hardly a Christian thing to suggest," I said, "but—but we've got to do it, whether or no. We can't let that crook turn over a new leaf. Whether he wants to or not, he's got to stay a burglar!"

"I think that's no more than fair," she passed thoughtful judgment; "at least, he ought to remain a thief till—till we're clear of this mess."

"My sentiments, precisely!" I agreed.

"But how are we going to prevent his reformation if he's got it in mind?" she asked.

"What's the cause of his change of heart?" I demanded. "The refining influence of woman. Cut out the cause, and—"

"You mean to get Agnes out of the way?" Kate wanted to know. "We can't discharge her. She's probably more than a little fond of that wolf in sheep's clothing down below—not knowing his real character as we do—and, if she left for another place, she'd tell him where she was going."

I slapped my thigh.

"You hit it a moment ago!" I cried. "What you said about the girl not knowing his character. Tell her a few plain truths about her swain and she'll pass him up."

I rubbed my hands.

"Why, that's a beautiful scheme!" I enthused. "As soon as she gives him the cold shoulder, his mind will revert, manlike, to business. He'll have nothing to keep him here any longer, and nothing to make him want to go straight. So off he'll skip with the silver that'll more than pay for the mending of his broken heart!"

"But what if her heart's broken, too?" asked that true woman—my wife.

"Aggie's no fool," I retorted. "When you tell her the truth about that fellow, she'll put him out of her mind in an instant. And, if he's courting her at all, it's no more than your plain duty to warn her what she's risking."

That decided her.

"I won't tell her why he's here in the house," said Kate, "because that would be letting leak what we don't want to have get out. But I'll sufficiently blacken his name to make her forget him, anyway."

Twenty minutes later I joined her in the dining-room.

"It's done," said she. "I think it could safely be said that Agnes won't waste many more serious thoughts on Mr. Burglar."

Under the table my knees touched the corner of the box. I pressed my shins against the wood with an inward chuckle. Soon, soon that hated packing-case would be out of my house now. There was nothing to prevent it—nothing at all.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BURGLAR MOVES.

THERE were marked traces of tears on Agnes's face as she served us our breakfast that morning. I felt sorry for the girl for a minute. And then I thought of the good my wife had really done by putting her on her guard against a hardened criminal. I knew it had been all for the best.

Before I left for the city, I had an opportunity to inspect the victim of our machinations. He was looking exceedingly glum.

It was on the point of my tongue to tell him, as I passed by him where he stood leaning dejectedly beside the gate, that the time was come for him to get into action—putting the suggestion in the form of an outright command to bear away that box without another hour's delay.

But I instantly thought better of the idea. I had lost none of my unhealthy fear of the armament he might have concealed upon his person. And I did not want to provoke my own murder by riling him.

I would let him take his own time in deciding to be off with his loot. He had been at the house almost a week; a day or two longer would make no particular difference. By that time, of course, he would see that his suit for the hand of our maid was useless, and nothing could deter him from leaving.

"What are the developments?" I asked Kate, as soon as I got home that night. "I see old Whiskers, the hanger-on, is still in our midst. How fares it with the fair Agnes?"

Into my ear Kate unfolded a tale of copious weepings and manifestations of heart-bruisings on the part of the poor girl, which had continued from the time of my departure that morning and had not yet ceased to be noticeable.

"Now, that's too bad!" I said soberly. "We didn't mean for that child to be hurt, did we? Perhaps—perhaps you made it too strong for her, Kate?"

My wife dabbed at her eyes.

"Perhaps I did," she admitted between sniffles. "Do you suppose I ought to take back some of the things I said to her?"

"Isn't it too late?" I questioned.

She rose and started for the kitchen.

"Maybe not," she said. "Anyway, I'll see what I can do in the line of a retraction here and there. I don't want to see the poor thing suffer any more than I can help."

How Kate got round it I don't know; but it seems that she contrived to give the impression that some few things which she had said that morning might be—well, not exactly untrue, but—yes, a little to the wrong side of exaggeration.

It appeared to cheer Agnes up amazingly.

But next morning the burglar was glummer than ever. Again I passed him lolling dejectedly beside the gate as I passed out. And this time he stopped me.

"I'm going to get out o' here to-day!" he announced gruffly.

"But not without taking it with you?" I blurted eagerly.

He looked at me.

"What d'ye mean?"

"You know."

"Speak up, mister! I guess I don't catch what you're drivin' at," he invited. "What's the idee?"

I drew in my breath.

"I know what you came here for," I told him.

His eyes narrowed. I noticed that unpleasant tightening of his jaw, which before had caused me perturbation, a stir beneath his beard.

"Oh," he said slowly, "so you know what I came for?"

"Of course," I assented.

"Knew it all along, I suppose?" he questioned me.

"All along; yes." I nodded.

Slowly his own head wagged.

"Werry good," said he. "Werry good."

I waited patiently for what was coming next. I felt that it might be anything, and, in the attempt to brace myself to withstand a series of shocks, my brain was in a whirl.

"It was cert'nly kind of you to take me in, knowin' that," he went on. "I feel obliged to you. But, as one man to another, I may say as it's no use—no use after all!"

I threw caution to the winds.

"Why do you say that?" I asked anxiously. "Why can't you get what you came here to fetch away?"

"'Cause," said he, "yer wife won't stand fer it."

I stared at him.

"My wife," I began.

"She don't like me," he explained. "And she won't stand fer it. That's why."

I dared to lay a finger on his arm.

"Listen to me," I pleaded earnestly. "Wherever you got that idea, take it from me it's wrong. My wife is just as anxious as I am to have you clear out with it. Did you think she wanted it? Ever since it's been in this house she's been crazy to be rid of it. Really, you'd do her the biggest favor in the world if you'd only come into your own."

He leaned toward me, breathing heavily.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Of course I do!"

He seemed as one suddenly waking to a hitherto unknown fact. Was it possible that anybody could have a head composed of such density as to mistake that our one simple desire was to have that box taken out of our house? Jove, it seemed that he hadn't been onto the situation from the first!

"Lemme get this straight," he said with laborious care. "You want me to take 'er away—you tell me so?"

"That's it!"

"And your wife?" he went on. "She won't put nothin' in my way?"

I felt like telling him she might put greased runners under him if he didn't get to business soon.

"No, no!" I assured him. "My wife and I are one in this. We feel the same, think the same, can be counted on the same. Have no fear on that ground."

He straightened up.

"All right," he said. "I'll do it!"

I looked at him severely.

"Now, let this time be the last!" I warned. "No monkey-shines any more. This is going to go through, now or never!"

"It certainly will," he nodded; "don't you worry!"

I came into the house that evening with sprightly step.

"And now, at last, all's well—eh?"

My wife looked at me.

"Meaning—?"

"The burglar's gone, I suppose?"

Kate's brows met.

"Why, come to think of it," she said slowly, "I haven't seen him since early this morning."

I strode into the dining-room. Bending, I looked under the table.

Gone!—I was ready to dance a jig for joy.

"It's all right!" I announced, coming back into the sitting-room. "At last the show's ended; the crook and his swag have pulled out. I tell you, old girl, this is a happy day for us—what?"

And I gave my wife a squeeze.

"This is where we celebrate!" I chuckled. "We'll drink a toast to the occasion. I happen to know where a certain cobwebby bottle of eighty-two lies down-stairs in the cellar. We'll have it up, and toss off a bumper for luck!"

I pushed open the dining-room door and called:

"Agnes! Oh, Agnes!"

There was no answer.

"Probably she's outside chopping kindlings," said Kate, passing me in the doorway. "Let me go and get her for you."

I came back into the sitting-room.

"John!"—my wife's voice calling to me. "John!" and I heard her running through the kitchen and dining-room toward me. "Oh, John!"

She burst in at the door.

"What the deuce—!"

I had caught sight of her pale face.

"You said the box was gone!" she panted. "It isn't. It's right where I put it to-day. Under the washtubs out in the kitchen."

"You moved it from the dining-room?" I asked.

"I wasn't going to have it standing on my rug forever," she nodded, "pressing the nap into a crease we'd always have to show for the time the thing was in our house!"

I was on my feet.

"Where's that burglar?" I demanded, setting my jaws.

"He's gone!" she answered.

"But—but he said he'd take the box!" I faltered. "He told me he would. I had his word for it—"

Kate waved a scrap of paper in her hand.

"If he didn't take his swag," said she, "he took something else."

I stepped back.

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"Mean?" she cried. "I mean this: *That thief has run away with our servant-girl!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

RECAPTURED.

"AND he's left the packing-case behind?" I blurted.

"I told you he had!" said Kate.

I ran my hand round the inside of my collar.

"We're done for!" I whispered. "Left in the lurch—by all the gods, fate's got it in for us. That's all there is to it. We're hoodooed, jinxed!"

"She was the best girl we ever had!" wailed my wife.

"If I could lay my hands on that swindling burglar," I grated through my clenched teeth, "by George, I'd make him come back and get his ill-gotten gains, or my name's not John Jones!"

I held out my hand for the paper Kate held.

"Let me see that," I ordered.

She relinquished the scrap. It was a fragment of cheap wrapping paper. The half-dozen uneven lines written in ink upon it ran something as follows:

DEER MIS JONES: what you took back about sayin of mister Weepin this mornin made me think. Maybe the rest you said wasn't any of it true neither.

Well he came to me and he loves me and he says what you said was all of it wrong so I am goin. we will be married so please excuse no notise. From, AGNES.

Something moist on my finger caused me to lift it from the paper. Ink—wet ink! I looked up at Kate.

"The stuff this was written with isn't dry yet!" I exclaimed. "It couldn't have been left where you found it so very long ago. Perhaps—if I only knew which way they went—"

My wife clasped her hands.

"Oh, John," she cried. "Go and bring her back!"

"Her?" I repeated. "It's him I want!"

"Don't let her marry that criminal!" she begged. "Think of that poor, innocent young girl's whole life ruined. Go after them. Stop them while there's yet time!"

"But I don't know which way they've gone." I shook my head.

"They'll be married at once, since they're both homeless," said my wife. "There's the City Hall in Leeming. It's the nearest place where they can get a license. The Interurban trolley-line that runs between here and there has its only depot down in town. That's where they've gone—it's a certainty that you'll catch them there!"

I jerked out my watch.

"Those trolley-cars only run once every thirty minutes, leaving on the half-hour," I muttered. "It's six-fifteen now. The ink on this note would have been dry if it had been written longer ago than ten minutes. I—maybe I could come up with them!"

I caught up my hat. My wife pushed me toward the door.

"Hurry, hurry!" she urged. "Don't lose a moment!"

I ran out on the porch, cleared the steps at a single jump, and was through our gate and galloping up the street in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

It's no more than a thirty-minute walk from our house to the town; I figured I could run it well within fifteen. And so I did, which should have brought me to the Interurban trolley-stop in time for the only car my quarry could have had time to catch.

But I figured without a faulty watch. I was ten minutes slow. It had been six-twenty-five when I left the house, instead of quarter past, and I tore up to the depot just in time to see the tail-lights of the six-thirty car rolling away in the gathering twilight.

I whirled on the nearest man, a fellow who was sitting on top of a barrel with all the appearance of having been there a considerable time.

"Did you see a girl and a man with a straggly beard and sandy hair get in that car just now?" I panted. "You follow the description? Remember seeing any couple that answered to it?"

The stranger crossed his legs.

"Now, it seems to me," he said leisurely, "that it was about five minutes before the trolley started—maybe a bit later, I can't say for sure—that I did see a pair that you might say bore some slight look about 'em that compares with that picture you've just give me. Um-m—yes, sir, they got on the car!"

"Thank you," I said. I mopped my brow. "Much obliged."

I stood there, helpless. What good did it do me to find out that the two I was chasing had gone on before? I couldn't follow, not in time to catch them before they wound up their little business at the City Hall in Leeming—

"Stung!" I exclaimed.

The thought had just dawned on me; it was after six o'clock and the City Hall was closed and had been shut up for a good three hours. Why hadn't I thought of that before — why hadn't Kate had her wits about her? Here I had come off on a wild-goose chase for nothing.

The burglar and the maid were on that trolley bound toward Leeming, though. What were they bent on doing there? It came in a flash that I had seen several letters, addressed to Agnes, delivered at our house with the Leeming post-mark. Then I remembered my wife mentioning once that our servant-girl had a sister who was also in service—at the Wilkins, by jove, old friends of ours who lived at an address I knew very well in Leeming!

I began to see what was up. The crook and the unsuspecting girl couldn't get a license to marry at that hour. So he was taking her to spend the night with her sister, and in the morning he would take her out and marry her.

But not if I could prevent it! As patiently as I could I waited till the next trolley-car pulled in.

At seven o'clock it was bearing me toward the next town at a fifty-mile-an-hour clip. And precisely at seven-thirty I was walking in at the gate of No. 326 Vanderspoof Avenue, in Leeming, where resided Bill Wilkins and family.

On the heels of a cordial reception, I made known my business. The story I told was invented on the spur of the moment; I told the truth about being after the servant-girl who had run away, but what hand in the affair her masculine companion had, I veiled by a tissue of quite plausible fabrications.

Of course, I could see the runaway maid, if she was in the house. She was, and I requested the privilege of seeing her with her sister and the burglar in the kitchen—minus the Wilkins family, if there was no objection.

I had no idea what argument I was going to use to persuade the thief and Agnes to return home with me when I walked into the kitchen and came upon them sitting stiffly against the wall.

As a starter, I cast a reproachful look at the maid—studiously avoiding the burglar's eyes.

"Aggie," I asked somewhat pointlessly, "why did you leave us?"

The girl evaded my gaze, embarrassed.

"I want to get married," said she.

A dazzling inspiration came to me.

"And married you shall be!" I declared. "But not in any snide, cheap-John way. That's why I've come after you. I want you to come back to our house. Mrs. Jones and myself want to show you our appreciation for your service, and—and we've decided to give you a wedding that will make your eyes bulge with its glory!"

Her face lighted up.

"A real wedding?" she cried.

"The grandest that money can buy!" I boasted.

She looked at the burglar beside her. The joy in her countenance stabbed me. It was a shame to delude the poor thing into thinking that we meant to marry her off to such a rascal; undoubtedly she loved him.

But I made up my mind that I would square that if it took my last dollar. I would hunt her up a man who would outshine whatever attractions Weepin possessed as far as a Gibson man outshines a comic valentine. I would see them married and so blot out the memory of that artisan of the jimmy forever from her mind. She should have her wish, get married, if it lay in my power to fix it.

"Do you hear what Mr. Jones says he'll do for us, Eddie?" the girl asked the cracksman. "Isn't that fine?"

"You'll come back with me, then?" I asked eagerly. "Er—both of you? You see, it's foolish to run away to get married, when you can have a wedding with all the trimmings right at home. We—we want to give you a grand send off, understand."

"Yes, sir, we'll come back," said Agnes. "And thank you ever so much, I'm sure!"

The burglar rose to his feet.

"No!"

He glowered at me.

"I'm through!" he announced.

I knew what he meant. He was through with a life of crime. He was going to settle down. Yes, but not till he had straightened out his account with us by carting away that wretched box.

"No, you aren't through!" I faced him boldly. "Have you finished your work at our house? What did I take you in for? Don't you think you owe us something for what we've done for you?" I cast a meaning glance at the girl. "Do I need to say anything more?"

His face reddened.

"I'm not going back," he grumbled. "Your wife ran me down to her"—nodding at his *fiancée*—"and she may do it again, for all I know."

"That was all a mistake," I said, talking for the girl's benefit alone. "I can explain it to you later."

"Mrs. Jones took back what she said, Eddie!" Agnes reminded him. "Why won't you come back?"

He hung his head.

"All right," he said. "I'll come."

That was all I wanted to hear. I bundled them out of the house, and, with the scantiest good-bys to the Wilkins, herded the two toward the trolley-line.

We reached home at past ten.

"I've brought 'em back," I told my wife, "but what in the name of all get-out we're going to do to get that burglar to leave here with his box, is more than I know. He won't go under the nose of the girl. Something will have to be done to make him take away his loot. Can you figure out a scheme?"

Kate looked thoughtful.

"I'll see what I can do," she said.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JONES PARTY.

I SHOOK out my paper at the breakfast-table the next morning and scowled over its top at my wife.

"Thought of anything?" I asked.

"Not yet," she shook her head.

"Well, you'd better hurry!" I remarked. "Time is flying, and each day is bringing us near to a show-down with that girl who expects her wedding with the burglar to take place according to schedule. We must get rid of him and his swag, somehow!"

"Could we do this?" she suggested. "Send him with the box to a room in some lodging-house in the city, and, while he's there with the stolen goods, have the police on hand to gobble him up with the evidence of his guilt?"

"Never in the world!" I scoffed at the idea. "Wouldn't he suspect we were up to something of the kind right away, and wouldn't he refuse to take the box anywhere in fear of just that sort of a trap?"

There was a pause.

"Tell you what we could do," I said at length. "As long as he's tried our patience, by persistently refusing every chance to get away with his loot and a whole skin, till we don't care what becomes of him, we could simply notify the proper authorities to come out here and gobble him up, box and all."

"Which would place us in a nice position," Kate nodded sarcastically. "Wouldn't that give away at once the fact that our house had been made a storage-place for stolen goods for almost two weeks? And don't we want to keep that concealed, if possible?"

"The police could be cautioned to make the capture without publicity," I suggested.

"It's likely that the neighbors wouldn't

know it," she retorted, "if a horde of policemen descended upon our household and dragged a thief from our midst, isn't it?"

I chewed hard on the ragged edge of my mustache.

Just then the telephone-bell rang.

"Hallo?" Kate answered the call.

A pause. Then—

"Why, how do you do!" She turned to me, and, with her hand over the mouthpiece: "It's the Joneses—the family with our name out at the other end of Ashtree Avenue!" she whispered. Then back into the phone: "What's that?

"A party? Just for the sake of having all the Joneses in town together—you've already invited the Wilburforce Jones family, you say? Will we come? Why, I think that would be lovely. What? Bring the children, too? All right—fine. Yes, we'll be there at eight-thirty. Good-by!"

She sprang up the instant the receiver touched the hook.

"Here's our chance!" she exclaimed. "We'll all go over to the Joneses to-night. That will leave the house empty. Empty, that is, of everybody but that burglar. I'll have Agnes come along with us under pretext of bringing wraps for the children. And—with all of us out of the way—you can notify the police to descend on the place and capture the thief without danger of incriminating us!"

I was on my feet, too.

"By golly!" I cried. "Do you think we can work it?"

"What is there to do," said she with an eloquent gesture, "but let the burglar fall into our trap without our lifting a finger?"

I snatched my hat.

"It's worth a flier, anyway!" I declared. "Perhaps this party idea of Jones will prove a life-saver to us. I'm off to see the police. You carry out your end and arrange to have the house cleared, just as you said."

The rest of that morning I spent in consultation with the full membership of the Spraycliff police force—four constables. They were wildly excited at the prospect of capturing so famous a rogue as the thief of the Stackpoole silverware. I gave them my directions for surrounding our house at nine o'clock that night. And then I hurried to the office.

The more I thought over the thing that day the more the idea grew on me. It was a way out of our dilemma at last. I knew that the constabulary of my home town would be so puffed up, once they had caught the burglar, that they would forget altogether to mention any help my wife or I had given them—which would protect us from scandal leaking out in that direction.

And, as a final stop-gap to the chance of gossip, the robber himself, once caught, would keep his mouth shut about how the box happened to be in our home, for the reason that he wouldn't want the world to know what a fool he had been in expressing it as he had.

It was an open and shut proposition. We would be rid of box and burglar. In addition, no trace of our connection with the affair would come to light. And there we were, with just what we wanted!

The only fault with the whole scheme was that its dénouement would prove a staggering blow to the trusting little servant-girl who had given her heart to that crook.

But it couldn't be helped. She would have to find him out some day, anyway. So perhaps it was just as well to have it happen now as later.

I hurried home at the earliest minute that night. And at half past eight, prompt to a dot, the whole family, children and Agnes included, were at our namesakes' house.

It seemed to me that our host was nervous that evening. Perhaps it was only anxiety lest his guests miss enjoying themselves that made him seem distraught. At any rate, I noticed his uneasy manner, and could not help commenting on it.

"It's that blamed ginger ale!" he whispered. "I ordered it this morning, and it hasn't come. Jove! I won't wait any longer; I'll go down and bring it up myself. Can't have this party spoiled, you know!"

He slipped out the back door. Perhaps ten minutes I stood on the door-sill, staring out into the night, my face turned in the direction of my house. Almost nine o'clock. What was going on up there? I wondered if I couldn't steal away for just two minutes and nose around out of sight—

"I'll do it!" I muttered.

My home was only the length of a short avenue separated from that of my neighbor. It took me but a minute to come to the front gate. And there I stopped short in my tracks.

The light was turned on full blast in the sitting-room, and, framed in the window, I saw a picture that brought the blood rushing to my head. Jones—my host, who had left me but a few short minutes ago to bring

home some ginger ale from the store downtown—was struggling in the arms of a man, and that man the burglar!

I waited to see no more. With a wild yell I plunged up the gravel path, in through the front door, and hurled myself upon the struggling two.

And, at the same minute, my shout had a counterpart in four staccato barks from the same number of decrepit lungs as the Spraycliff constabulary surged into the house through windows, back door, and front entrance.

"Surrender, in the name of the law!"

I was grabbed from behind. So was Jones. Also the burglar.

"Why, it's Mr. Jones!"—the officer who held me let me go.

"Here's t'other Mr. Jones, too!" And my recent host was released.

"Who's this?" asked the policeman who had hold of the crook. "This must be the feller we want!"

I was just about to announce that he was right.

"It's all right, sir." The burglar wagged his head at me before I could open my mouth. "I heard this chap"—nodding at Jones—"prowlin' round in here. So I come down to see what he was doin'. That box in the kitchen—whatever's in it—he was after. I seen he was some kind of a sneak-thief. So I pounced on him. I wanted to save your property for you if I could."

What in the world— Was he trying to bluff his way out of the situation, I wondered.

"Better let me explain," said my namesake quietly.

"I wish you would!" I cried, wheeling on him. "I wish you would explain how you, who went out after ginger ale, happened to wind up in my house?"

"I'll make a clean breast of the thing from the start," said he. "I sent a box of silverware, addressed to myself, down here to Spraycliff about two weeks ago. The thing didn't show up. So I went to the station to find out about it.

"There I learned that the box had come, all right, and been delivered. That was all I found out. Because, you see, I didn't care to make any more than indifferent inquiries. So I could only imagine that the package had been turned over to one of us three Joneses here in town; but which one I didn't know.

"I've been waiting all the time for the one who got it to return it to the express office. And, when that didn't happen, I thought up a little scheme that I tried out to-night. I invited you and your family, and Wilburforce Jones and his family, over to our house. That, I figured, would leave your homes bare—and I meant to search first one and then the other for my box."

I saw it all now. Instead of a thief sending that box by express addressed to an unknown John Jones, it had been sent to himself by the burglar whose own name, it happened, was that. And this man at whose house my family was calling that night, this fellow who had lived in the community for years and never let a soul suspect that he was other than honest as the day—he was the robber himself!

It was a fine twist to a situation already replete with surprises. A fellow I had known for as long a time as I could remember, a burglar! True, I had never heard his business mentioned in all our acquaintance; and how coolly now he came out with the admission of his ill-famed profession—

"You see," he was saying, "I'm a detective. It's something I've had to keep a secret all the time up till now, and I hope nobody present will let it out in future. I've been working on this Stackpoole burglary case—the contents of that box, as you must know, Jones, is the missing plate.

"The robber whose trail I was following hid the stuff, and I found it. Not wanting him to know that his cache had been discovered till we could catch him revisiting it, I didn't return the silver to the owners—which would have been noised abroad at once—but sent it to myself to hold till the thief was in our grip. That's all!"

"And you"—I turned to the man with the straggly beard called Weepin—"what are you, anyway, and why did you want to attach yourself to my household?"

"Me?" he asked in surprise. "Why, I'm an expert gardener—honest to goodness I am. And I wanted to come here to be near your hired girl. I've known her, you see, for goin' on three years. We've been steady comp'ny since her last three places, and—and, you know, you've said you was goin' to give us a weddin'—"

"I am!" I interrupted firmly.

And then Jones and I and the gardener turned and bade good night to the Spraycliff constabulary.

(The end.)

A $10,000 Haircut.

BY ARNOLD HOFFMAN.

One of the First Things They Do to a Convict Is To Shave His Head, as This Traveler Found Out.

HOPKINS got off the train and languidly surveyed the little Western town that lay before him.

The train pulled out and disappeared in the distance, and Hopkins still stood and gazed before him in a vague, disinterested sort of a way.

There was nothing striking about Amos Hopkins further than the fact that his clothes needed pressing and his hair cutting. This latter need in particular was most evident, for his hair, growing as it did on an ordinary, every-day scalp, was devoid of the flare and curl of the inspired would-be artist, and hung down the back of his collar and about his ears in thin, straight unsightly strands.

Hopkins was not exactly a vagabond. He was a fortune-hunter. For six months he had trailed over the continent in pursuit of money which, however, had refused to come his way. His pocketbook was still quite as flat as it had been on the day he set out on his wanderings.

There was a girl at the bottom of it all, of course. There always is. It was not the irresistible lure of "*Die Wanderlust*" that drove Hopkins to isolated mining camps, where he was forced to thrive on a canned veal-loaf, beans, and bacon diet. It was not to satisfy a roving disposition that he underwent the torture of riding for two nights and a day in a second-class day-coach, together with a lot of evil-smelling immigrants.

No, it was all for the love of a girl. Hopkins wanted to marry her, but he had to make some money first.

His latest venture had been out in the far West, over a hundred miles from a railroad track, where for three months he had tried his hand successively, but not successfully, as prospector, camp cook, and surveyor's helper. Now he had come to this three-legged Kansas town.

Why? Because some one had told him of newly discovered oil wells there.

Hopkins knew nothing about oil, but he knew that it had been the means of making many people rich, and he saw no reason why there shouldn't be a chance for him.

Eventually the telegraph operator brought him back to the realization of his immediate surroundings by a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"What's the matter, partner? Are yer lost?" he asked.

"Oh, no," replied Hopkins languidly, "I was only t-t-thinking. I'm looking for o-o-oil."

"What kind of oil?" asked the operator with a smile.

"I really don't know. J-just the regular kind, I sup-p-pose."

Prepare for the worst, gentle reader, you have surmised correctly. Yes, Amos Hopkins was inclined to stammer slightly at times.

With these last words he heaved a deep sigh, gathered up all his baggage, which consisted of one much worn and battered suit-case, and sauntered forth in search of the Palace Hotel.

As he walked along the main street, he accidentally caught a glimpse of his reflection in a display window, and was struck by the fact that his personal appearance was most deplorable. Not being known in the town, he began to fear that the natives

might mistake him for an escaped wild man or lunatic or something.

This possibility worried Hopkins considerably, and the more he saw of his reflection the more embarrassed and uneasy he became.

"Before I go to the hotel, I'll stop at the first barber-shop I run across and get a haircut," he said to himself. "That will help an awful lot."

He had not far to go before his eyes encountered a red and white striped pole. Hopkins went in, hung his hat and coat on a hook and slowly wiped the results of an oppressively warm July day from his forehead.

Two of the three chairs were occupied. The available chair was the one farthest in the rear of the shop and was tended by a keen-eyed, dark individual with a fierce black mustache and an exquisite flaring growth of wavy hair that must have required the supreme effort of skilled tonsorial art to keep it in trim.

"Give me a hair-r-c-c-cut," instructed Hopkins, as he settled himself into the chair.

"Ye-ye-yes, sir. How—how d-d-do you want to have it cut?" asked the obliging barber.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" sighed Hopkins, inwardly, as he heard the man stammer, and then he thought over the questions he had asked. It was warm, excessively warm, and his long neglected hair enveloped his head like a fur cap. Seized by a sudden impulse, he exclaimed: "Cut it off wi-with the c-clip-clippers. I-ee-I-ee'll be nice and cool for once."

The barber got out the instrument and fell to work, while Hopkins delighted over his bright idea sat and watched his brown hair tumble off in large lumps.

"What do you do for your st-t-t-am-amering?" he asked the barber, by way of conversation.

"N-n-nothing," answered the tonsorial artist, blowing the hair from his clippers. "It j-just c-comes natural."

"They say that De-d-d-Demosthenes cured himself by p-put-putting moth balls or some-some-something like that in his mouth; but it didn't hel-help me any," remarked Hopkins.

"Well," sighed the barber, "I've tried ev-ev-everything from-from Mrs. Pink-pink-Pinkton's p-p-pink p-pouf! p-pills to carrying a dried bean wi-with a thread tied round it in my p-poc-pocket; but I ain't q-q-quite c-c-cured yet."

"Yes, that's j-just the wa-way it g-g-goes," agreed Hopkins, absentmindedly. "My grandmother nev-never *was* cured of lumbago."

The deed accomplished, Hopkins passed his hand over his smooth head, looked himself in the glass and began to regret the fact that he had allowed himself to be carried away by a sudden rash impulse. That afternoon when he lay down for a nap in his room at the hotel, he regretted it still more, for the sticky flies that persisted in crawling over his bald cranium made it impossible for him to sleep. At night it was still worse, for the flies were supplanted by a swarm of mosquitoes, who soon inflamed his poor quivering scalp with a thousand burning, itching welts.

"Holy smoke!" Hopkins almost whined as he tossed and tumbled in his bed.

The hot, stuffy room, the incessant biting of and slapping after mosquitoes having driven him almost to the point of positive distraction.

"I am always doing something crazy that I am sorry for afterward. It was the same way with this tattoo mark," sighed Hopkins.

In the dark he regretfully passed his hand over his right wrist, where, close to the base of the thumb (the most common place for such marks) was tattooed a small anchor. When a boy he had, while under the spell of an adventure story, undergone the torture of having it pricked into his skin.

"Oh, fool that I am! Fool that I am!" he sighed and groaned all night and fell asleep as the sickly gray shimmer of dawn crept over the broad still prairies.

II.

It was after ten o'clock the next morning when Hopkins, after vainly attempting to soothe his itching scalp with cold water, sauntered forth to make an inspection tour of the town.

After making inquiries as to where the oil wells were situated, he walked down the main street in the direction given him. He had not gone very far when he ran into an excited group of people all talking at once and jostling each other and craning their necks to get a better view of a large bill that was tacked in a conspicuous place in front of the post-office.

Hopkins edged his way into the crowd to look also, and read in glaring letters:

$10,000.00 REWARD.

Ten thousand dollars ($10,000.00) reward for the recapture, dead or alive, of Bill Sayer, the notorious train-robber and slayer of Conductor Brown.

Sayer escaped from the State Penitentiary at Leavenworth, where he was sentenced for life, and has been at large for several days.

Description: Medium build, smooth face, dark hair closely clipped, has tattooed anchor on right wrist near base of thumb, and stammers.

"A dangerous man," said one in the crowd. "I'll bet a barrel of apples that they'll never catch him again."

"Don't you fool yourself," replied another. "Posses are searching for him in every direction, and if he ever happens to land in these parts, he's a sure goner. No crook ever got away from our sheriff, John Merton. If Sayer knows what's good for him, he'll give Merton's territory a wide berth."

Hopkins stood and listened.

"Wish I could catch that scoundrel and make that ten thousand," he thought. "That would be all I needed. I'd go back and get married at once. Oh, if only I could catch Bill Sayer. If I only could—if I only could!"

He turned to read the notice again, when suddenly there was a stir among the crowd, and all looked excitedly up the street.

"Here comes Merton now," cried several.

"That's Merton on the sorrel horse. They're startin' out to hunt for Sayer."

Hopkins looked with the others, and saw a small group of horsemen ride slowly down the street. When they reached the crowd they drew rein, and the leader, a tall angular man, with a drooping mustache, shifted his old-model, long-barreled revolver to a more comfortable position, while his sharp blue eyes searched the crowd with swift, penetrating, though seemingly careless glances, his gaze resting but for an instant on each face.

"Are you going out after Bill Sayer?" asked some one.

"Yep," replied Merton, without diverting his gaze.

"Are you on his trail?"

"I think so," answered Merton, a curious twinkle creeping into his eyes as he dismounted slowly. "I'm pretty certain of it," he continued, walking into the crowd. "In fact I'm darned sure of it, 'cause I've got him right here."

He make a swift catlike motion of his hand toward his hip.

"Throw up your hands, Bill Sayer!" he cried, pushing the long barrel of his gun into the face of the astounded Hopkins. "I arrest you in the name of the law!"

For a moment Hopkins stood paralyzed and speechless from astonishment and fright, but his self-possession soon returned, for he remembered of having read in books about the rough and startling jokes that Westerners liked to play on supposed tenderfoots, and he saw in this a decided opportunity for making a good impression on the townspeople as well as on the sheriff.

He laughed uproariously.

"G-go long with you, p-par-partner," he ejaculated, amid convulsions of forced hilarity. "Y-y-you'll have to try that j-j-joke on some other man."

But the glitter in the sheriff's eyes only became more intense, causing the blood to rush to Hopkins's heart with sickening apprehension.

"I've got to give you credit for being game," said Merton grimly. "And that bluff might have carried if your stuttering hadn't given you away."

Hopkins's laughter vanished like water poured on desert sands, and he gazed straight before him with perplexed, wide eyes that saw nothing. Not until two sharp clicks and the cold pressure of hand-cuffs on his wrists brought him out of his trance did he fully realize the seriousness of his predicament.

"Good Lord, man!" he pleaded. "You are mak-making a t-t-terrible mistake. My name is-is Am-Am-Am-Amos Ha-ha-Hopkins. I never heard of-of Bill-Bill S-Sayer before-be-before I struck this t-t-town."

"Not Bill Sayer, eh?" drawled Merton. "You've got the anchor tattooed on your right hand. Your hair is clipped in regular penitentiary style, and what there is of it is brown, and your eyes are brown and you stutter. But you're not Bill Sayer. Oh, no; of course not.

"You're Ethelbert McGinty, or Sam Jones, or whatever you please, and of course I believe all that."

And the sheriff grasped poor Hopkins firmly by the shoulder and motioned for the crowd to make way.

Hopkins continued to remonstrate, but to no avail. Among his few belongings he had—

no positive marks of identification, and his pleading for time in which to telegraph to relatives in the East fell upon deaf ears. He was taken to the hotel and thoroughly searched.

"B-but I only had my-my h-h-hair clipped yesterday," said Hopkins, flushing with new hope, as the thought struck him. "I can take you to the bar-b-b-barber-shop; the man who c-c-cut it will re-remember me. He will tell you that my hair was long, long down o-over my-my c-col-collar. It could not have gro-gro-grown that long in a few-few d-d-days, could it?"

"No," agreed Merton, "it couldn't, and just to show you that I'm fair and square, I'll give you this chance to clear yourself. Lead the way to the barber-shop."

With a bounding heart Hopkins obeyed. Certain now that he could clear up the mistake, he walked along with a light step, the joyous anticipation of proving his identity overbalancing his feeling of shame at being compelled to walk through the streets handcuffed.

At last they reached the coveted barber-shop. No sooner had they entered the door when Hopkins, pointing his hobbled hands dramatically in direction of the last chair, cried triumphantly: "There, there, there is the man!"

But here he stopped short and gasped in dismay, while his face took on the color of a Swiss cheese. In the place of the debonair artist-barber of yesterday, stood a blond, sleek little man with a round stomach and a short, fat neck.

"Where-where is the other bar-barber?" asked Hopkins of the head barber and proprietor of the shop, a florid, rotund German, who, beside himself with excitement at seeing the sheriff, several armed men, and a hand-cuffed prisoner enter his peaceful establishment, was adjusting and re-adjusting his large tortoise-rimmed spectacles and swallowing his Adam's apple while he muttered: "Vat do you bring me, Mr. Sheriff? Vat do you bring me inside here? Some vair iss someding crookett in der air.

"Oh, der odder fellow," he said, in answer to Hopkins's question. "He has went. Kraus down der vas sick, und der odder fellow I had to help me out a pair of days or so. Yesterday late, Kraus came back already, und I let der odder fellow go."

"But where is he-he now? Where-w-where does he l-l-l-live?" asked Hopkins despairingly.

"That I don't know," answered the German. "I never before saw him. When Kraus sick became, I a sign put in der vindow, 'vanted a barber to haircut und shave a few days,' und he applied. Dot's all vat I know."

"But you-you still remember me, d-d-don't you?" pleaded Hopkins, clutching at the last straw.

"Yes," said the German slowly, and stopped for a while to examine him carefully through his large glasses. "Yes, I don't remember you."

"But you do—you do!" persisted Hopkins frantically. "I was the man that c-c-came in the mor-morning w-w-with a grip and a w-r-r-r-wrinkled gray-gray suit."

"Mit a wrinkled grip und a gray suit? Ach, no, no. Oh, vait a little! Yes, I t'ink yes. You vas der man vat vanted tonic to make your hair grow out quick. Not?"

Poor Hopkins groaned in utter despair. Everything reeled before his eyes when he heard the stern voice of Merton, who had been standing by in silence all the while.

"Well, I guess you've had a fair chance," said Merton. "I've fooled enough time away here. Everything else is against you, so you come along with me and we'll let the warden at the penitentiary decide whether you are Bill Sayer or not. A plain-clothes man with two convicted burglars caught in Wichita is coming through here on the train for Leavenworth this afternoon.

"I'll just put you in his charge and let him take you along, while I go out with the men to look for Waters, who escaped at the same time you did. He must be around in these parts somewhere."

With that the men formed a guard round Hopkins and marched out, while the German barber raised his hands in consternation and cried excitedly *"Ach, Gott!* It iss Bill Sayer, der escaped penitentiary!"

III.

TOWARD the middle of the afternoon the expected train arrived, and Hopkins was taken aboard and into a smoke-bedimmed, foul-smelling, second-class smoking-car, where he was placed in charge of his new guard.

The detective—a broad-shouldered man, with a cold, serious, yet not disagreeable, face—seemed greatly pleased over the fact that the new and notorious prisoner was to be turned over to him, and exclaimed joyously:

"Good for you! You've caught Bill Sayer, have you? You're a wonder, Merton. There is no use talking, it takes you to catch them slick fellows, don't it?"

After Merton and the detective had arranged matters between them Hopkins was taken to a seat occupied by two low-browed, coarse-faced criminals, whose wrists and ankles were securely chained together.

Poor innocent Hopkins shuddered at the very sight of them, and then, as in a dream, he saw the scoundrels unchained and felt himself being fastened between them. To sit three in a seat in a public day-coach, with a low criminal chained to either side of him, and a sharp-eyed detective opposite watching his every move, was a cruel, bitter pill for respectable Amos Hopkins, fortune-hunter, to swallow.

The criminals, on the other hand, nodded amiably to their new companion, and felt greatly honored at having so distinguished a colleague in their midst.

The train pulled out of the station, and the excited, curious throng that stood gazing after it was left farther and farther behind until it assumed the appearance of a small speck on the horizon and vanished completely; but Hopkins did not look up once. He kept his eyes riveted on the floor before him with a fixed stare, and prayed with all his heart that the train would be wrecked.

But, as the hours went by and his prayer was not answered, he gradually began to take an interest in his surroundings; but he still refused to speak either to the prisoners or the detective. Toward evening, as Hopkins was gloomily gazing at the farther end of the car, the door opened and an elderly, well-groomed gentleman with a Vandyke beard and black-rimmed glasses attached to a wide silk cord that hung about his neck, entered.

He puffed leisurely at the end of a long cigar as he walked up the aisle, and looked carelessly from left to right, as is the custom of Pullman passengers who walk the length of the train for the sake of a little exercise and diversion.

He walked the whole length of the car. On his return trip he paused beside the double seat occupied by Messrs. Amos Hopkins & Co., and nodded to the detective in an amiable, patronizing manner.

"Well, I see they have given you another one to take care of," he smiled. "When I walked through here early this afternoon you only had two."

"Yes," answered the detective, who was glad to have decent company and some one to talk to. "Yes, they caught this one," jerking his thumb toward Hopkins, "in one of the towns we passed through, and turned him over to me."

Here the detective plucked at the venerable gentleman's sleeve and whispered impressively into his ear: "It's Bill Sayer."

"Oh," said the gentleman, much awed.

The two then talked for some time about criminals, the kind-hearted gentleman saying that he felt sorry even for the worst of them. But at the same time he took pains to emphasize the fact that it took a lot of brains for a man to be a detective.

"Won't you have a cigar?" he asked, drawing one from his inside pocket and offering it to the detective.

"Thanks," said the other, proceeding immediately to bite off the end, while at the same time fumbling for a match. "That's just what I've been wishing for all afternoon."

The gentleman smiled pleasantly as he turned to go; but, stopping quickly, as if struck by a sudden thought, he said: "I have some fruit back in my Pullman section, much more of it than I want. Would you have any objection if I brought some of it to these poor fellows here? That is, of course, if they want it," he added hurriedly.

"Do you fellows want some fruit?" sharply asked the detective, turning to the prisoners.

"Sure thing," answered the two hardened criminals. "Bring it along."

Hopkins said not a word.

With a nod and smile the old gentleman left, and the detective made himself as comfortable as was possible in the brutally upholstered seat and puffed at his cigar. Before he had finished his cigar the dingy lamps were lighted. It had grown quite dark, and Hopkins, looking out, noticed that there was no moon.

The car was almost deserted, the only other passengers being an Italian couple with four small children, and a red-faced Irishman whose breath and heavy sleep told the story of too many prescriptions for whisky filled in Kansas drug-stores.

The Italian family, too, was asleep, wrapped in delicious vapors of unadulterated garlic, and dreaming serenely, perhaps of the wonders of the Eternal City or the glorious bay of Naples—perhaps of a carload of garlic! Who knows?

Gradually the detective's eyes became heavy. He drowsily cast aside the remaining bit of his cigar and began to twirl his thumbs in a slow, stupid manner. At this juncture the kindly gentleman returned with a neat little basket filled to the top with grapes and apples.

"Here you are, boys," he said warmly—"a nice little basket of fruit to help cheer you a little. Won't you help yourself?" he asked, turning to the detective first.

"No, thanks," mumbled the detective somewhat incoherently. "Just give it to 'em and let 'em help themselves."

The old gentleman smiled and did as he was told. Each of the scoundrels helped himself to an apple, and the one nearest the window took the basket and placed it on the floor beside him.

Hopkins refused at first, but later, when the munching of juicy apples in each ear became unbearable, he asked to be given an apple also, that he might add his mite of noise to the fray.

The old gentleman stayed but for a moment, and then departed with a pleasant "Good evening," but before he had closed the door behind him the detective was fast asleep.

The two convicts exchanged knowing winks and continued to munch their apples, leaving Hopkins to battle with a thousand wild speculations.

Once, the brakeman passed through hurriedly and called out the name of a station, but did not even glance at any of the passengers. A quarter of an hour after the station he called was passed the train stopped again.

There were no houses or lights anywhere about, and one of the convicts, after stretching his neck out of the open window, drew his head hurriedly back again and whispered:

"They're taking on water. Here's our chance," and then adding to Hopkins: "Have ye tumbled, pal? The cigar was doped."

Plunging his hand down into the bottom of the basket, he drew forth a file, a strong, sharp pair of wire nippers, and a billy. In a flash he had cut the chains that bound their ankles and the three started for the door.

"We can cut the cuffs later," he whispered.

For a moment Hopkins thought of resisting or attempting to give the alarm, but a glance at the threatening billy awed him into submission, and he went along quietly. Unnoticed, the three fugitives crept along in the dark, down the embankment, across the ditch, and into an open field covered with tall grass.

Here the two criminals threw themselves flat upon the ground, and Hopkins, though his whole being rebelled against it, was compelled to do the same.

He rested his face on the stiff prickly grass as long as he could endure it, and then he ventured to ask cautiously:

"Why—why"—every time he opened his mouth to speak it was filled with grass—"why do we st-st-stay here so-so long? It's dan-dan-dangerous. There may b-b-be snakes in th-th-this grass."

"Dry up, you gink," one of the criminals hissed into Hopkins's ear. "We've got to 'lay low' until the train gets out of sight."

Hopkins said no more, and lay without moving a muscle until the roar of the departing train grew faint. Then the two rose, drawing Hopkins up with them.

"Well, pal Sayer, what are you going to do—go along with us or shift for yourself?" asked one of the men as he proceeded to clip the handcuff-chains.

"Shift for—for myself," replied Hopkins quickly.

"All right; here's a file to cut the cuffs off with. So-long, and good luck to you, friend."

With that the two desperate characters struck out across the fields and left the bewildered Hopkins to himself. His first thought was to get rid of the telltale handcuffs, and he applied the file with frantic energy, sometimes filing his wrist and sometimes the heavy iron band. It was a long and tedious job, but in the course of a few hours he had accomplished the deed, and, with a great sigh of relief, he cast file and all as far as he could fling them, and wondered what to do next.

He walked about at random until he grew footsore and weary; then, making a pillow out of his coat, he lay down in a corn-field and went to sleep.

IV.

He was awakened by the hot rays of the sun. Scrambling to his feet, he gazed about him in confusion until he realized where he was and what had happened. He was without money. Something had to be done. He had to have money.

Several miles to the west he spied a farmhouse, so he decided to go there and ask for work. When Hopkins put in his unshaven, uncombed, unwashed appearance the lanky old farmer received him kindly and put him to work hoeing onions at a dollar and a half a day. Though the work was new to him, and his poor, empty stomach was gnawing most alarmingly, Hopkins worked bravely and persistently in the sweltering heat, stopping only now and then for a brief instant to pass his shirt-sleeve over his dripping brow.

The farmer, on the other hand, though he was hard at work when Hopkins arrived, now seemed to have very little to do, and stood around chewing on one end of a long blade of grass while he stalked to and watched his new farm-hand.

At noon the farmer brought out a heaping basket of choice lunch, and in the evening Hopkins was called in to eat with the family. He was given a place at the head of the table, both the farmer and his rotund wife paying him the most marked attention, time and again heaping his plate with the choicest chicken, mashed potatoes, and corn-bread, while the swarm of children, ranging in ages from two to fourteen, sat mutely by with open mouths and, with eyes that bulged from their sockets, stared at the stranger.

After the meal was over the farmer took out his pipe. Then he rummaged about in his tool-box and brought out a slightly damaged cigar, which he presented to Hopkins, after which he told six of the children to give up their room to the stranger and sleep in the kitchen.

Hopkins felt greatly elated. He chatted with the hospitable rural couple while he smoked his cigar, and then went to bed. For many months he had not been so happy and contented and at peace with the whole world. In a few moments he had fallen fast asleep.

Hopkins was not a heavy sleeper. How long he had been asleep he did not know, but he was awakened by the sound of muffled voices in the adjoining room. He sat up in bed and listened.

It was the farmer talking to his wife. The mumbling was very low and indistinct, but Hopkins's sharp ear managed to catch the words:

"Mirandy, this certainly is a stroke of good fortune. I telephoned. They'll be round in a little while. Old woman, I guess we'll have money to buy us a autermobile, for one thing, with that ten thousand."

The hair—that is to say, if there had been any hair on Hopkins's head, it would have stood up on end—and he got out of bed like a flash. Hardly daring to breathe, he crept to the door and tried it.

It was locked. Next he examined the window. It refused to open.

His heart began to beat like the pump on a fire-engine. With haste approaching madness he threw on his clothes; then, seizing a chair, he broke out the window with one mighty blow and jumped out into the open. Putting every ounce of strength into the effort, he ran like one possessed.

The watch-dog made an embarrassing attack upon his trousers, and two shotgun charges whizzed about his ears; but Hopkins, unharmed, and heading straight for the tiny railroad depot, about the location of which he had made inquiries of the farmer during the day, only ran the faster.

Four miles is a long distance when one is running for one's life, and barbed-wire fences, invisible because of the intense darkness, are bad things to have head-on collisions with.

Yet, poor desperate Hopkins had all this to contend with. Moreover, every root and stone in the country seemed to have been placed across his path, and each took the keenest delight in tripping him up, while innumerable ditches lay quietly in waiting for him to tumble into and scramble out again.

Completely exhausted, blood trickling from a network of scratches on his hands and face, his clothes torn into shreds, Hopkins finally reached the station. He dared not show himself, and scarcely knew what to do, now that he had reached his goal; but a string of waiting freight-cars gave him a sudden inspiration.

"I'll steal a ride," he mumbled, and in the darkness began to try the side-doors until he found one that was unlocked.

After casting a careful, searching glance about him he climbed into the car and drew the door closed behind him. Then he felt his way carefully toward one of the corners where he hoped to escape detection in case the brakeman should make an inspection tour of the cars.

Suddenly his foot touched something soft and bulky, and the next moment he realized that he had stumbled over the body of a man.

"Ha-a-ave a c-c-c-care, you-you ch-chump," growled a voice out of the inky darkness.

V.

HOPKINS received such a fright that he was struck speechless and sank down in his corner unable to offer even a word of apology to his fellow vagabond.

Those stammered words out of the darkness had had their effect on Hopkins, and all night he sat in his corner of the rapidly traveling freight-car, hardly daring to breathe or move a muscle, while a thousand wild speculations rushed through his mind.

Who had uttered those words? Was it the voice of Sayer? If so, what was there to be done? When morning came, would the notorious character still resent the fact that Hopkins had stepped on his stomach in the dark?

All these things troubled our hero greatly, and he looked forward to the dawn with no small degree of apprehension. Or to put it in more refined English, toward morning he got white round the gills fearing that the guy, Sayer, might pump him full of lead.

But when the first light of day found its way through the ventilators of the car Hopkins gave a great sigh of relief, for he recognized in his fellow traveler the barber who had clipped his hair and caused all the trouble.

Indeed, he was so overjoyed at this discovery that he introduced himself to the man, and immediately launched forth into a spirited conversation, in the course of which he told the barber all the terrible experiences that he had had to put up with because of that unfortunate hair-cut.

The barber was greatly amused at the things Hopkins told him, and laughed most uproariously. Then he told Hopkins a long tale of wo, in which he said that ever since he was discharged from the German barber-shop he had been unable to find employment of any kind. Therefore, now, as a last resort, he was knocking about the country as a tramp, for he was penniless, homeless, and friendless.

Hopkins listened attentively. His heart ached for the poor barber, and with deep compassion he watched the latter's face, in which the muscles were twitching from pain and anguish. Incidentally he noticed that the barber needed a shave, and presently he noticed also that while the unfortunate man's mustache was of the deepest shade of black, his stubble beard was light brown. Hopkins now pricked up his ears and became suspicious.

Though the weather was very warm, the barber had a curious habit of always keeping his right hand in his pocket. Moreover, Hopkins saw that his right hip-pocket bulged most considerably.

The barber now opened the door a trifle (which he managed to do with one hand) and looked out.

"We are c-c-coming to a good-si-si-sized town," he remarked. "We'd b-b-better jump off."

With that he made for the opening at the end of the car, near the ceiling, and climbed out on the roof. He used both hands to draw himself up, and in that instant Hopkins caught sight of the tell-tale tattooed anchor.

Positive now that the barber was Bill Sayer, the escaped convict, Hopkins followed him out on the roof and down the ladder at the side of the car. In close succession they jumped to the ground and started to walk down the track in the direction from which they had come.

Hopkins was tingling with excitement, but he managed to make no outward show of it. He did not know how in the world he was going to overpower Sayer, now that he had him; for Sayer, in addition to being of more powerful build than Hopkins, carried a gun.

But of one thing he was certain. Come what might, he would stick to Sayer until the right opportunity presented itself.

He suggested going to town and looking for work; but the barber refused, so the two walked along the track until toward the middle of the afternoon, when they came to a wide creek whose banks were lined with heavy shade-trees.

The heat was terrific, and heavy clouds were beginning to gather. Hopkins was nearly exhausted from want of food and sleep, and when the barber suggested going down to the creek and sitting in the shade for a while, he was only too glad of the opportunity to do so.

After they had rested for a while the barber pulled out a razor and began to shave himself. But even before he had completed this operation the sky became overcast as by one enormous black cloud, in which the lightning flashed to and fro,

while below not a breath of air was stirring. Hopkins had never seen anything like it before, and he began to feel very uneasy.

"Looks l-l-like a cy-cy-cyclone," remarked the barber, growing very pale.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth before a gust of wind swept down upon them like a tidal wave. The sky opened up, and a funnel-shaped cloud dropped down and set out upon its path of destruction.

"Down! Down!" yelled the barber, and threw himself flat on his face.

Hopkins, crazed with fright, ran round like a chicken with its head cut off, and finally sprawled himself out about twenty feet from where the barber lay. The next instant he was aware of a tremendous crash, followed by a feeling as though he had been shot in the head, and then he knew no more.

When Hopkins came back to his senses he found that he was buried under the branches of an enormous tree. Eventually he discovered that, save for a large bruise on the back of his head, he was in perfect working order, so he crawled out from among the branches and looked round to see what had happened.

Loud cursing was the first thing he heard, and, looking in the direction from which it came, he saw the barber, who, with the heavy trunk of the tree resting across his legs, was calling loudly for help, between curses.

"Help! G-g-get me out of here. My leg's b-broke. I c-c-can't move," he cried.

Hopkins gave one yell of delight, and the next instant was ripping his shirt to pieces and tying the barber's hands together with the strips.

"I g-g-g-g-got you, Bill Sayer. I g-g-g-got you!" he kept repeating.

When Sayer's hands were securely bound, Hopkins pulled off the man's wig and took the revolver from his pocket. With these he ran up to the railroad track, and waited impatiently for the next train to come by.

For two hours he walked up and down in anxious anticipation, and then at last he heard the whistle of an engine. It was a passenger-train, and Hopkins succeeded in flagging it.

When the train's crew jumped down to find out what the trouble was, Hopkins became so excited that he could not bring out a word, only stammer and stare and wave his hands wildly.

"Sing, man—sing it to us," cried the conductor, and Hopkins, with the light of deepest gratitude illuminating his face, burst forth to the tune of "Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly" and explained somewhat as follows:

> "I've just captured Bill Sayer
> The escaped train-robber.
> He's right over there behind the ditch
> Under a great big tree.
> His hands are tied and his leg is broke,
> Here's his wig and here's his gun,
> Just help me get him on board the train.
> The ten thousand dollars are mine!"

With a score of willing men to help, the tree was soon removed, and Sayer taken on board the train.

In due time Hopkins received his ten thousand dollars reward; went back to the East a hero; married the girl; got his picture in the magazine section of a Sunday paper, and signed a contract to appear in vaudeville and tell his experiences at a salary of two hundred dollars a week.

ILLUSION.

"BEWARE!" cried Age; "yon luring flowery way
Let not thy young feet press.
So once to me its false fair colors glowed.
'Tis all enchantment; farther out, the road
Winds through a wilderness."

Unheeding Youth passed on; magician Love
Looked down with a rare smile.
To him then Age cried out in tones of pain:
"Have pity, and deceive *me* once again,
Just for a little while!"

William Hurd Hillyer.

A Flight from a Throne.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON,

Author of "Worth His Salt," Etc.

The Trials and Turbulences That Resulted from a Youth's Refusal To Open an Envelope.

CHAPTER I.

BEING BOTHERED.

"IT'S a beautiful building, isn't it?" remarked an oily voice in Allerton's ear.

Immediately the State House lost all charms for John Allerton. He was in no mood for discussing architecture with any one, much less the unpleasant-looking individual who had, in the short run between Boston and Providence, made three unsuccessful attempts to engage him in conversation.

"Very," he snapped; and, turning his back on the gleaming white pile, stalked across the aisle to his own chair, whirled it round so that its back was presented to the rest of the car, and sank into it, hoping that repeated rebuffs would dampen the ardor of the fellow until he should leave him alone.

Things had come to a pretty pass indeed, he reflected, when a man could not travel on the limited without being accosted by any babbling idiot who had nothing to do but waste his own and other people's time.

Ordinarily, Allerton would not have been so disagreeable; but his trip to Boston had been a dismal failure, and he preferred to be alone with his not too pleasant thoughts. Besides, he was not given to making casual acquaintances at the best of times.

Tall and broad-shouldered, with well-modeled features, thick dark hair and brown eyes, John Allerton possessed an unusually winning personality, exercising a subtle charm that was felt by all with whom he came in contact.

He had boarded the train at the South Station in Boston, found his chair, and tried to interest himself in a book. The attempt had proven futile, however, and he was gazing abstractedly out of the window, when the man who sat directly back of him —a thin, dark, foreign-looking person, with sleek, black hair, olive complexion, eyes like pools of pitch under their thick arching brows, and even, white teeth— leaned over and asked him for a match.

Wondering why he did not go into the smoking-car and get one, Allerton complied with the request, which was promptly followed by another—that he accept a long black cigar and go into the smoker to enjoy it with the donor.

He declined both the cigar and the invitation, rather curtly, yet with the innate courtesy that was a part of his charm. And not fifteen minutes after, the man was begging him to accept a couple of magazines, printed in Spanish!

Allerton read and spoke the language with ease, yet he could not conceive how the other had suspected the fact. Not caring to read, however, he shook his head with a smile, and turned again to the window as the train pulled into the Providence station.

The State House was a familiar object to him, and he rose and crossed the car to admire its imposing beauty, when the man deliberately left his seat and followed him, making the remark recorded at the beginning of this chapter.

The fellow's persistence was extraordinary, but Allerton trusted that he would be left in peace for the rest of the journey, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

The white-coated and aproned waiter went through the car, droning out:

"First call for luncheon in the dining-car!" and the greater number of the passengers rose and followed him.

Allerton had breakfasted late and was not hungry, so he remained in his seat.

A glance showed him that, with the exception of an elderly couple at the other end, he and his dark-skinned annoyer were the only remaining occupants of the coach. Evidently the man thought the opportunity favorable, for he arose, and, taking the seat opposite Allerton, bent forward, showing a dazzling array of teeth in a wide smile.

"The *señor* does not wish to converse, is it not so?" he inquired urbanely.

"I should think that might be clear, even to you," returned Allerton deliberately. "I regret if I seem discourteous, but—"

"But it is necessary that I speak," interrupted the other, with a still more brilliant smile. "Otherwise I should not intrude upon Mr. Allerton's reverie."

Allerton shut the book upon his knee with a snap. It had been open at the fly-leaf, which bore his name; and the methods employed by the foreigner were apparently not those of a gentleman.

"You think I did not know you?" the man went on, as he noted the action. "You are wrong. I have followed you for some time, but I have been unable to speak to you before, so I have seized this opportunity."

"That is interesting," remarked Allerton with cold politeness. "But permit me to tell you again that I have no wish to talk to any one at the present time. You will confer a favor by leaving me to myself."

"It is my misfortune to have to accost the *señor* at a time when both his business and love affairs are wrong," the man observed. "But I am come to set them right—the former, at least, which will lead to the latter, as a matter of course."

"You are impertinent, sir!" exclaimed Allerton, a dark flush coming to his cheeks. "Impertinent and presuming. I have about reached the limit of my patience with you; and I should advise you, for your own good, to take your seat behind me and put an end to this very unpleasant interview."

"The *señor* must not take offense. I but do my duty to my employers," protested the man. "If the *señor* will but read—"

He drew a long blue envelope from his pocket, glanced furtively up and down the aisle, and, with a dexterous flirt of his wrist, deposited the packet just inside the arm of Allerton's chair.

Allerton caught a glimpse of portentous-looking red seals, and his own name, inscribed in a queer, unfamiliar handwriting, before he picked the envelope up.

"Thank you, but I am not interested. And now I must ask you to excuse me."

He dropped the envelope upon the man's knee, and turned his chair half-way round.

The train was just pulling into New London, and the foreigner rose.

"I am sorry to persist," he remarked softly, and the envelope again fell with a soft thud beside the now thoroughly exasperated Allerton. Before he could return it, however, the man had hurried down the aisle and swung himself off the steps.

Allerton followed as far as the car-door, and, without as much as a word, tossed the offending blue receptacle out upon the platform, where it fell almost at the feet of the man, who had turned to look back.

The doors closed again, and the cars moved slowly forward as Allerton regained his seat. He caught a glimpse of a dark-skinned, malignant face, upturned to his window. The man was walking swiftly along and apparently muttering to himself.

Unfortunately for his own welfare, he was so interested in this occupation that he neglected to take care of where his feet were taking him, and collided rather violently with a burly negro.

The latter waited for no apologies, but with one hearty shove sent the fellow reeling into a pile of crates and boxes. The last Allerton saw of the pair they were engaged in a heated altercation.

The young man leaned back in his chair and opened his book, while a slow smile crept over his face.

"Serves him right," he said to himself. "The nerve of him, trying to sell me fake gold-mining stock or something like it! That sort of thing oughtn't to be allowed."

Had Allerton known what disastrous consequences were entailed by his refusal to open the envelope, he would have given a good deal to have it once more in his possession.

CHAPTER II.

INSISTENCE.

WHEN Allerton had first met Madge Craig, a little over a year before, he had been strongly attracted to her; and in the course of a winter and spring,

during which they had been constantly meeting at social functions, and he had been a frequent visitor at her home, his feeling for her had gradually ripened, first into sincere friendship, and then into love.

He had not been precipitate in his declaration, but had waited until he had some hope that she could return his affection; she was beautiful, very popular, and much sought after among the younger set.

But when he had at last spoken out he learned to his great joy that she cared for him. Her mother's consent was readily obtained. Indeed, Mrs. Craig assured the young man that she knew of no one to whom she would rather entrust her daughter's happiness; and for a few short months Allerton lived in a fool's paradise.

And then the angel with the flaming sword, in the shape of trouble on his South American estates, had appeared and summarily ejected him from his temporary Eden.

Until this time Allerton had reckoned himself a man of wealth. His fortune was not spectacular; but, at the same time, he was more than comfortably well off.

At his father's death he had succeeded to the large and flourishing coffee plantations in Chilquitina, which every year produced a substantial income; and, as he had been brought up with a thorough knowledge of the details of the business, the estate had suffered no depreciation under his management.

The present trouble was due to no fault of his; but was entirely owing to bad crops, a panicky market, some new quirks of the Pure Food law, regarding the labeling of coffees, and last, but not least, governmental agitation in Hiltique, the capital of the tiny republic.

All of these matters had been duly represented to the young master of the estate—as well as chronicled widely in the newspapers—and his agent had intimated that his immediate presence on the scene of action was desirable, not to say imperative.

Accordingly, he made his preparations for instant departure, engaged passage on a steamer bound for Puerto Manuel the following week, and took the first train he could catch for Boston, whither Madge Craig and her mother had gone a few days before to pay a round of visits.

His intention was to ask Madge to marry him at once, and go with him to South America. He knew that he might be detained for months, perhaps years, and he had no mind to wait an indefinite time before claiming his bride.

He was perfectly well aware of the suddenness of the proposal, and was prepared for some opposition; but he counted upon Madge's love for and loyalty to him to overcome any obstacles which her mother might impose.

What he had not counted upon, however, was the reception which awaited him. Before he had been ten minutes in the house he understood clearly that news of his financial disaster had preceded him.

His suggestion was received with mild scorn by Mrs. Craig, who even went so far as to hint delicately that Madge was very young yet; that she must not think of marriage for a long time to come, and that possibly a mistake had been made when the engagement was entered into.

Allerton expected Madge to repudiate these sentiments; to his dismay, she did nothing of the kind. She declined to see him, sending down word by her mother that she was indisposed; and Mrs. Craig, acting as her daughter's emissary, gently but unmistakably gave Allerton his dismissal. She lamented the necessity for it, but she was firm in her determination to end the engagement on the spot.

Madge had thought at first she had loved him, she said; but now she had thought it over, and she was not sure of the exact state of her feelings. And she could never consent to marry a man she did not love with her whole heart.

In other words, John Allerton, with a large fortune and great future possibilities, was a most desirable *fiancé*. But John Allerton, with a jeopardized fortune and uncertain prospects, was a person to be gotten rid of very promptly.

Allerton had gone away, carrying with him bitter thoughts of the woman of whom he had thought the world—the woman he had believed sweet and good and noble. And she was, after all, but an empty-headed society doll, a mercenary, little-souled creature, whose first, last, and only thought was—money!

The young man refrained from the time-honored declarations of jilted youths, who, upon being cast aside by some fair and fickle maid, promptly lose all faith in women and abandon trust in the entire sex, vowing themselves henceforth misogynists. But Madge had represented to him all that

was good in women, and to lose his faith in her was a severe blow.

He knew that if she had cared for him, as she had all along pretended, she would have gone with him gladly; but in reality she had cared only for his fortune, and the prospect of getting along for an indefinite time on a few thousands a year had no charms for her. She was still sufficiently young and beautiful to fetch a higher price in the matrimonial mart.

The fact that Allerton understood the state of affairs perfectly did not, however, serve to make him feel any better. It is extremely galling to a man who believes that he has won a woman's love, to find that he has merely bought her—or, rather, obtained an option on her. And that, if anything should render it impossible for him to pay the price, some higher bidder will assuredly carry off the lady.

Later on, Allerton knew that he would be glad that things had turned out as they had, and that he had been unable to take up his option on the lovely Miss Craig; but for the time being he was a bitter, disappointed, and disheartened man.

One blow had robbed him of the girl he loved and of the greater part of his fortune; and as he stared moodily out of the window at the brown fields, crossed here and there by low stone walls and flecked with patches of glistening water, he felt that he had been pretty hardly used.

He had dreamed of a pleasant home in the south, with Madge Craig as its charming mistress. He had pictured her slender figure, clad in filmy white, waiting for him on the veranda of his pretty bungalow, in the scented dusk of the tropical evening.

And he had been awakened rudely to find that home and wife were but figments of his imagination. He must go alone; there would be no one to await his return in the evening; no one, indeed, to care greatly whether he returned or not.

By this time every one knew that he was no longer the very wealthy John Allerton, to be courted and sought after as an addition to any occasion. And very soon it would be common knowledge that Madge Craig had thrown him over.

His fortune might be retrieved; it would require much time and hard work, but it was not irrevocably gone. But the girl he had hoped to make his wife was lost to him forever.

Indeed, she did not exist; or, if she did, he had never met her. For she had been but a part of his dream, and Madge Craig's beautiful body had been but the shell in which his dream-girl had dwelt.

A steamer appeared on the horizon, the faint spirals of smoke from her funnels staining the perfect blue of the sky. In a few days Allerton would be upon the deck of a similar craft, leaving friends behind, and about to begin a new life.

The porter came through the car.

"Mr. John Allerton!" he bawled. "Mr. Allerton! Message for Mr. Allerton!"

"Here!" said Allerton, fishing in his pocket for a coin and holding it out to the darky.

"Thank yo', sah! Hyar's yo' package. Gemman gib it to me at New Lunnon."

It was that detestable blue envelope.

The persistence and effrontery of the man made Allerton's blood boil with anger.

"Porter," he said, "please open that window."

A moment later the envelope whirled through the air and floated away on the placid bosom of the Sound; Allerton rose and went forward to the dining-car.

At any other time he would have opened the blue envelope out of sheer curiosity; had the little foreigner waited until the next day before delivering it, a great deal of trouble would have been avoided.

Allerton did not give it another thought. It was too trivial an incident to cause him more than a few minutes' annoyance, and he had other things to occupy his mind.

So it was that the envelope grounded on the muddy shore, almost at the feet of a man who was digging a bastketful of clams for his dinner. The man picked it up.

CHAPTER III.

A SPECTACULAR ENTRY.

"WHAT is that?" Allerton inquired suspiciously, pointing to a small black trunk that stood, locked and ready, beside his own.

"That is a brontosaurus," Norton cheerfully informed him. "Have you never seen one before? And it is mine."

He appeared totally unconcerned as Allerton bent over and examined the label.

"I thought so!" the latter exclaimed. "But I'm going alone, you know, Ted."

"No, you're not," returned Norton imperturbably. "Now, look here, Jack," he

went on quickly, before Allerton could protest; "you may not need a secretary or anything like that down there, but it's just possible a friend may come in handy.

"You don't know a white man in the place, except that red-headed Simpkins, and he's such a blithering idiot he'll be worse than no one at all. You don't have to speak to me if you don't want to; but you don't own the steamer nor the continent, so you'd best say no more about it.

"I'm not in your employ now, remember, nor under your orders. If agreeable to you, I'll stay at your place while I'm in Hiltique; if not, there's a hotel where they'll take me in. And I have a sneaking suspicion that you wouldn't turn me over to the tender mercies of the Spanish cook at the Plaza House."

"Have it your own way, then," said Allerton ungraciously. "I suppose I can't stop you, if you've made up your mind to go."

"You're right, you can't," said Norton, with a grin.

Secretly, Allerton was more than a little pleased at Norton's determination to accompany him. For several years they had been associated in business; nominally, Norton was Allerton's secretary and confidential adviser; in reality, he acted in any capacity his friend chose.

They had been members of the same class at college, and had belonged to the same fraternity; and when Allerton had gone into business with his father immediately after leaving the university, Norton had entered the office as a clerk.

Allerton had advised him to seek another position when it became clear that disaster had overtaken the estates; and had presumed that Norton was so doing.

If Madge Craig had been a different sort of woman, Allerton knew that Ted Norton would have remained in the United States, as a matter of course. But as soon as he learned that his friend was going alone, he calmly packed his trunk and surreptitiously engaged passage on the same steamer.

Once only was the name of Madge Craig mentioned between them, and that was when Allerton left the limited at the Grand Central Station, and Norton had greeted him with the words:

"Well, Jack, will she go?"

And Allerton had replied briefly:

"She will not."

Norton had asked no further questions; but he had been able to form a pretty correct idea of what had taken place. The disappearance of Miss Craig's photograph, which had always stood conspicuously on Allerton's dresser, assisted him to his conclusion; but he wisely refrained from commenting on the affair, which he rightly judged to have affected Allerton deeply.

On the morning of their departure the young coffee-planter stood in the middle of his sitting-room, looking round the bare apartment, denuded of its furniture and fittings. He had given up his rooms; he would have no need of them now. But he sighed as he watched the vans bear away the last of the furniture to storage. He had been very happy here.

They went on board the steamer early, and at noon the moorings were cast off and the long voyage was begun.

During the run to St. Thomas, in the West Indies, Allerton was, for the most part, engaged in poring over reports from Simpkins, the resident agent of the estate, making notations on the margins of the sheets and adding up long columns of figures for verification. To Norton, who shared his cabin, he had little to say, and he scarcely noticed his fellow passengers, so occupied was he with his own thoughts and plans.

After leaving Barbados, however, he began to take a little more interest in what was going on about him, and talked hopefully to Norton of the ultimate adjustment of the troubles in Chilquitina, the tiny republic in which part of the estates were located.

"You never can tell what those fellows are going to do, though, Ted," he said, one morning, as they stood on deck.

It was over a month since they had left New York, and they were just entering the mouth of the beautiful little river on which was situated Hiltique, the capital of Chilquitina, and Puerto Manuel, its port.

On every side towered mountains, their gleaming peaks piercing the tranquil blue of the wonderful turquoise sky. The sea shimmered like some mighty jewel overhung by a vault of cloudless blue. The muddy ooze of the banks was almost hidden by the luxurious vegetation. Norton declared that he had never seen such vivid greens, such flaming reds and yellows, in his life.

"I think," remarked Norton, his eyes on a graceful little launch that had put out from the stone quay and was now making for the steamer's side, "that one can hardly tell what any one is going to do. We needn't

confine that peculiarity to the Chilquitinians."

Allerton nodded.

"But they possess it in an astonishing degree," he said. "If they are not trying to pick a quarrel with their neighbors, they are scrapping among themselves. And now, from what Simpkins writes me, they are trying to get into trouble with their big neighbor on the north.

"As far as I can make out, President Perez believes that the state is entitled to the greater part of my property, which is tantamount to saying *he* is entitled to it; and since I have naturally declined to give it up, he proposes to take it, which will entail a little heated discussion. Part of the estates lie over the northern border, having been gobbled by the northern Republic at the time my great-grandfather was driven from the Chilquitinian throne.

"As you know, the title to what were then the crown lands has always remained with our family; and what Perez expects to gain, except a row, is more than I can understand. Even if I were willing to turn the estates over to the government—which I most certainly am not—I think the northern Republic would have a word or two to say."

"But where does the border actually lie?" asked Norton.

Allerton laughed.

"*Quien sabe?*" he said. "Wherever the bigger and stronger state says it does, sonny. Hallo! What's all this?"

A sudden commotion had risen aft. Hoarse shouts of men mingled with the shrill cries of women; people ran hither and thither, staring at some object in the river. Allerton hurried to the rail and peered over, just in time to see the dark head of a man disappear beneath the surface of the water.

It rose again almost immediately, and a pair of frightened eyes met the American's before their possessor sank again from sight. The launch was too far away as yet to be able to render assistance, and the crew of the steamer seemed paralyzed, uncertain what to do.

Allerton did not hesitate. In a flash he had kicked off his low shoes, dived overboard, and, reaching the spot where the man had gone down, gripped him by the collar as he rose for the third and last time.

The launch was speeding toward them, and Allerton held the almost unconscious man's head out of the water until the little craft, making a half circle, reached his side. Then they were lifted aboard and transferred to the deck of the steamer.

The man, who proved to be one of the steerage passengers, had had a narrow escape, but was otherwise little the worse for his unexpected ducking; and having assured himself of this, Allerton hurried below to change his clothes, though not before the man he had saved had insisted upon kissing his hand, much to his embarrassment and the delight of those gathered round.

When he again emerged on deck, Norton was waiting for him.

"Spectacular entry you've made," he observed. "The chap wasn't in any danger; launch would have picked him up in a minute. But you had to make a grandstand play, didn't you. There's a chap wants to see you now; waiting over there. Probably he's come to offer you a medal for heroism."

Allerton laughed good-naturedly, and turned to meet the man who, in spotless white uniform, gold-braided cap in hand, was hurrying toward him.

"Señor Juan Allerton?" he inquired respectfully.

"That's my name," Allerton said.

With a profound bow the man held out an envelope. Allerton broke the seal and, drawing out the enclosure, glanced quickly over it before passing it to Norton.

"What do you make of that, Ted?" he asked.

"I should say it was a practical joke," returned Norton, after reading the letter. "Who is Don Miguel Roberto, and what does he want of you? And why is 'everything in readiness for your arrival'? Who are you, anyway, that you should be received with all this blare and clashing of cymbals?"

"If you'd ask one question at a time, I should probably be able to answer it," Allerton said. "Don Miguel is one of the grandees of the city, and, I believe, doesn't love Perez a lot. He may want to see me about the trouble I've been having.

"Are we to return with you?" he added, turning to the messenger and speaking in Spanish.

"*Si, señor,*" answered the man.

"And you, Ted?" Allerton asked. "Do you want to go with me, or would you prefer waiting until Simpkins sends the launch across the river for you?"

"I'll go with you," said Norton promptly. He was glad afterward that he did.

CHAPTER IV.

ROYAL BLOOD.

NORTON was not particularly impressed by his first view of Hiltique. Indeed, the capital of Chilquitina appeared to him to be but a sort of suburb of its port, lying, as it did, a little farther up the river, which shoaled rapidly above Puerto Manuel.

Allerton declared that the only reason for not merging the two absurdly small cities into one was the Chilquitinian love of show, and their desire to ape Colombia by dignifying their capital city with a port of its own.

Certain it was, however, that the river was far too shallow to admit of a large vessel anchoring at Hiltique; and it had become customary for even those of lesser draft to discharge their cargoes and passengers at Puerto Manuel.

The home of Señor Miguel Roberto was in Hiltique proper; and the two friends found a carriage awaiting them at the wharf when, half an hour after they had embarked from the steamer, the launch landed them at their destination.

Norton was full of interest and curiosity as they drove through the capital in the swiftly falling twilight; but to Allerton the narrow, twisting streets, the natives in their gaudy clothing, the low buildings and gay bazaars had nothing new to offer.

He was anxious to find out what Don Miguel might have to say to him, so that he could at once go across the river to his *fazenda,* or coffee estate, and consult with Simpkins as to the best way to meet the difficulties created by President Perez; and accordingly he gave vague and absent-minded replies to Norton's eager questions.

The carriage turned from the plaza into a wide avenue bordered on either side by tall Brazil-trees and marked by symmetrical plots of earth, in the center of each of which a fountain plashed musically.

"Look, Jack, quick!" exclaimed Norton in a low voice, laying a hand on his companion's arm. "Isn't she a peach? I wonder who she is?"

"She" was in a carriage approaching from the opposite direction; and as Allerton looked up, he found himself gazing full into one of the most charming faces he had even seen in his life.

In the brief glimpse afforded him in the pale moonlight, he gained a fleeting impression of a sweet, mobile countenance, framed in wavy, dark hair, a pair of deep blue eyes, and a delicately tinted complexion that spoke plainly of a life spent under other than tropical skies.

"Who is she?" repeated Norton, giving his arm a little shake.

"How the deuce should I know? I never saw her before."

Allerton half turned in his seat to stare into the darkness into which the carriage had vanished.

"Some visitor, of course. I should say she is not a resident; or, at least, she has not been here long. She couldn't have been, and still have kept that wonderful coloring.

"Besides, she was alone; and it is not customary here for girls or women to go abroad without a duenna."

"Well, I mean to find out who she is, first thing I do," Norton announced, and then relapsed into silence, which Allerton made no effort to break until, a few minutes later, they were ushered into the presence of Señor Miguel Roberto.

The *don* received them in a long, low room, furnished only with a rectangular table, with chairs on each side, and a heavy armchair at either end. There were several windows in the apartment, the blinds all closely drawn; and but one door—the one by which the two Americans had entered.

The *don* himself was unmistakably Spanish, short and stout, with a long, drooping mustache and keen black eyes. His manner of greeting Allerton wavered between cordiality and servility, with a tendency toward the latter; and Norton, who was secretly much amused, received a polite but scarcely warm welcome.

"It's easy to see that a mere secretary isn't in the same class here with a rich planter and the descendant of one of the rulers of the country," he whispered to Allerton as the *don* stepped to the door to give some low-voiced directions to a servant. "He's got my number, all right."

"You forget—I'm not a rich planter any longer," returned Allerton. "And I may never be one again, if Perez succeeds."

"I am sorry to have to ask you to wait a few minutes, Mr. Allerton," the *don* said as he returned and took a seat at one side

of the table. "The others will be with us shortly."

"Is any one else to be here?" asked Allerton in some surprise. "I understood from your message that you merely wished to talk over the situation here. I fear I am somewhat out of touch with local politics; and my affairs here—"

"Have been in good hands, I assure you," said the *don*, with a courtly inclination of his head. "It is imperative, however, that what transpires here to-night be known to as few people as possible. Your friend—"

"Is in my confidence," interposed Allerton.

The *don* bowed.

"I crave your pardon," he said. "But, surrounded as we are by spies, it is necessary to exercise the utmost caution, in order that no hint of our plans leak out."

"And these plans?" inquired Allerton. "I am quite in the dark as to what you propose to do, and how you intend doing it."

"Whatever was not made clear in my message will be explained in full immediately. The messenger we employed was one of our most trusted men; but even then we dared not commit our plans to paper lest they fall into unfriendly hands. The general has been the moving spirit, you understand, from first to last; I but act as his agent."

"The general?"

"You realize, of course," continued the *don*, "that we could not work alone. But they are all faithful and loyal followers that we have gathered about us—men who would do and die for the man in whose veins flows the blood of Manuel the Second."

Allerton laughed pleasantly.

"And I thought I was forgotten here," he said lightly. "However, let us hope that nothing of that sort will be necessary. When a certain gentleman, whose name I need not mention, realizes the magnitude of the task he has undertaken, I believe he will be ready to cry quits. He needs a lesson, though, to keep his hands off other people's property."

"And that lesson he shall have!" declared the *don* earnestly, as he rose to open the door in response to a gentle knock.

Three men entered the room and bowed deeply as the *don* introduced them to his guests, although they did not offer to shake hands. They were all in the uniform of the republic; but Allerton caught the name of only one—General Zella—a middle-aged man, well above medium height, with iron-gray hair, fierce mustache, and piercing black eyes set far under heavy, beetling brows.

He carried himself stiffly, with an aggressive, somewhat overbearing, manner; and Allerton was not favorably impressed with his appearance.

"If you will sit here, Mr. Allerton," Don Roberto said, indicating one of the arm-chairs. "And you, Mr. Norton, kindly take the seat at the corner. We have now to wait only for— Ah, she is here!"

He flung open the door to admit a tall woman, heavily veiled, who bent her head slightly in greeting as the three Spaniards sprang to their feet and stood bowing low before her. Allerton and Norton had also risen, the former in considerable surprise that a woman, and evidently one of birth and breeding, should be interested in the matter they had come to discuss.

The *don* carefully closed the door before conducting the woman to the end of the table opposite where Allerton was standing.

There was an expectant hush as she raised her veil, and Norton gave a smothered exclamation of surprise and pleasure as he recognized the face of the girl whom he had seen driving in the avenue but a short time before.

The general took a step forward and flung out his arm with a commanding gesture.

"Your imperial highness," he cried triumphantly, "I have the honor to present to you the Princess Maria, Empress-to-be of Chilquitina, and your future bride!"

Allerton gave a gasp of consternation and fell back a pace.

General Zella was looking full at him.

There was no room for doubt that he—and he alone—was the man addressed!

CHAPTER V.

THE COMEDY.

IT would be difficult to say which was the more surprised at Zella's dramatic announcement—John Allerton, or the stately girl who stood regarding him with wide, startled eyes. Allerton was the first to recover his self-possession.

He pushed back his chair and moved round the corner of the table to face the general. The *don* was bowing and rubbing

his fat hands together with an access of mistaken enthusiasm.

"If this is a joke, General Zella," the young planter said sternly, "I object to being made the butt of it. I came here to talk business with you gentlemen, and apparently I am to be treated to a scene from a comic opera.

"As for this lady"—and the glance he threw the Princess Maria was tinged with a scorn that was not lost upon her—"I am unable to recall having had the honor of meeting her before; certainly, if I have ever asked her to do me the honor of marrying me, it has slipped my memory."

A dull flush stained the general's swarthy face. He bowed stiffly, and looked at Don Roberto. That gentleman hastened to speak.

"Your imperial highness misunderstands," he was beginning; when, with a rustle of skirts, the girl swept round the table and cut him short.

"I am afraid we have all misunderstood—you most of all, Don Roberto," she said sharply. "If I have not been deliberately deceived, I have been sadly misled.

"Mr. Allerton, perhaps you will know who I am when I tell you that my name is Marie Carlos, and that Manuel the Second was my great-grandfather as well as yours. I am your English cousin, of whom you must have heard your father speak."

"And are you starring in this comedy, Miss Carlos?" asked Allerton coldly.

He hardly knew whether to be more annoyed with the general, the *don*, the girl, or himself; but he felt that he had been made to appear ridiculous, and that his new-found relative had been at least partially cognizant of this absurd and melodramatic declaration made by the general. She had entered the room with the air of a queen greeting her subjects, and the tone she had used in speaking to the *don* was much the same that a member of the royal family might employ when addressing a courtier who had fallen from the imperial favor.

That any woman in her senses could countenance such nonsense seemed incredible to the young man. He was both angry and amused, and not a little disgusted. The girl moved away from him, drawing herself up to her full height as he repeated his question:

"Are you starring in this comedy, Miss Carlos?"

"If you choose to regard it as such, then I am!" she returned, her eyes flashing. "But, at least, I have not engaged you to play the part of leading man."

She turned her back full on him.

"Don Roberto—General Zella," she went on, "you will kindly explain how you dared to take a liberty as to couple my name with that of this—this gentleman!"

The *don* bowed, if possible more deeply than before.

"If your highnesses will only be seated," he begged.

Allerton made a gesture of disgust.

"Please drop that 'your highness' business once and for all with me!" he requested curtly. "My name is Allerton, and you will do me the favor to use it. If you will be seated, Miss Carlos?"

General Zella cleared his throat.

"I'll do the talking, Roberto," he growled. "I was led to believe, Mr. Allerton, that all our plans were perfected and that you approved of them. Since apparently I am mistaken, I will outline the situation in brief."

Allerton nodded.

"Go on," he said.

"The people of Chilquitina are unhappy," resumed the general. "They are oppressed by Perez in many ways. Their prosperity is a thing of the past. They long, as one man, for the times that are gone—the time when the wise and noble Emperor Manuel II was their ruler. In short, they desire the restoration of the empire.

"And in accordance with their wishes, we have asked you, Mr. Allerton, and the Princess Maria, known in her adopted country as Marie Carlos, to ascend the throne and rule over the land. The princess has already consented. It remains for you—"

"Just a moment," interrupted Miss Carlos, leaning forward. "It is true that I consented to occupy the position to which I am entitled by right of my royal blood. But this is the first time I have heard that I was not to be the sole ruler of Chilquitina—the first time I have heard Mr. Allerton's name mentioned here.

"Don Roberto gave me to understand that my country was in need of me; that the people who revolted and drove my great-grandfather from the throne had repented of their action, and had called me here that they might make amends.

"Certainly, I never dreamed that any such extraordinary plan as you have suggested was in your minds, or I should never have come here."

She flung a defiant glance at Allerton.

"And this is the first I have ever heard of the scheme at all," remarked Allerton. "I presume my consent is somewhat necessary before I am made emperor, is it not?"

"You had my message?" cried the *don*. "You understood what you were to do in case you were willing?"

"I had your message—yes; otherwise I should not be here. But it merely stated that the conference was to be held at your house to-night, and that you would send a carriage—"

"No, no! The other message! The one you received in the United States!"

Allerton looked puzzled.

"What are you driving at? I received no message from you until I landed at Puerto Manuel this afternoon."

The *don* shot a hostile glance at him.

"Impossible!" he declared excitedly, getting to his feet. "You are deceiv—I mean, that you must be in error, if you will pardon my saying so. The message was sent you; and had it not been delivered, you would not have known when to come, what route to take, what time to arrive."

"Look here, Don Roberto," Allerton said patiently, "all this is very trying. I am neither deceiving you, as you were about to say, nor have I made any mistake.

"I came to Chilquitina at the request of my resident agent, who seemed to feel that my presence was necessary, leaving New York on the first steamer I could get after he wired me to come. If you sent me any letter, it must have miscarried; and if it contained directions, and I inadvertently followed them, it was merely a coincidence that I did so."

The general leaned over the table, his keen eyes searching Allerton's face.

"You received that message in a blue envelope, sealed with red, while you were on board a train going from your city of Boston to New York," he said in the voice of one who clinches an argument.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REIGNING HOUSE.

"IN a blue envelope—red seals—" mused Allerton. "Oh, yes, of course; I remember now! A foreign-looking chap did give me such a thing, but I thought it was some sort of an advertising dodge—an invitation to buy shares in some fake gold-mine or land-improvement scheme. I never even opened it."

"Where is it? You have brought it with you?" The general's voice was eager.

"I'm sure I don't know where it is," Allerton said indifferently. "I threw it out of the car-window."

"*Carramba!*"

The exclamation broke from the general involuntarily, and was quickly followed by an apology to Marie Carlos, who nodded her acceptance before the general turned again to Allerton.

"You say you knew nothing of the reason you were asked to come here to-night?"

Allerton shook his head.

"Absolutely nothing," he said. "I supposed that Don Roberto wished to consult with me over the present agitation in the capital. Without presuming unduly, I think I may say that I have some little political influence; and I inferred from his note that he wished me to throw it into the scale against President Perez.

"I came here, as I told you before, entirely on my own initiative, and in accordance with no prearrangement."

General Zella struck the table a heavy blow with his fist and turned fiercely on Don Roberto.

"You have managed this very cleverly, Miguel!" he sneered.

The *don* shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Perhaps, instead of mourning over what is past and gone, it would be as well to tell Mr. Allerton the things it is needful for him to know," he suggested.

The general seemed unable to think of any better idea, but it was quite evident that he was considerably ruffled.

"In the message which was sent you, Mr. Allerton," he began, "a message which I myself dictated and entrusted to Don Miguel for delivery into your own hands, you were given to understand that, as the lineal descendant of Manuel the Second, the late Emperor of Chilquitina, your rightful place was upon the throne.

"The present government is corrupt; the nation groans beneath a weight of unjust and exorbitant taxation. The administration is honeycombed with what you Americans call 'graft.'

"If you agreed to our proposal to restore the empire, you were not to attempt to communicate with us in any way, but were to leave New York on a certain date, by a

certain steamer arriving in Puerto Manuel this morning.

"There you were to be met by a servant of Don Miguel, who would conduct you here. You did all these things. The natural inference was that you had agreed to our proposals. Am I not correct?"

"That would be the obvious inference," agreed Allerton.

"Our army is ready," continued the general. "It awaits but the word from me to rise and overthrow the tyrant who rules, cruelly and unjustly, from the palace of your ancestors.

"And I await but your permission to say that word. The government troops are few in number, lazy, ill-disciplined, badly drilled, and, above all, dissatisfied with the present government. They can offer no adequate resistance, nor will they attempt to. In twenty-four hours you can be absolute ruler of Chilquitina—the Emperor Juan the First!"

The general paused and looked expectantly at Allerton. Before the young man could speak, the clear voice of Marie Carlos interposed.

"Where do I come in?" she inquired.

CHAPTER VII.

DISSENSION.

THE general started. Evidently he had been so absorbed in his plea to Allerton that he had completely forgotten her presence.

But if he were at a loss, Don Miguel was not.

"If your claim to the throne was forgotten—or ignored—by some, your highness," the latter said, with a meaning glance at the general, "by others it was remembered and urged. For a time it seemed impossible to reconcile the two opposing factions; but a happy solution of the problem was reached when it was suggested that a marriage between the royal cousins would smooth all difficulties. Accordingly it was so arranged."

"Indeed!" said Miss Carlos scornfully. "That was kind of you all! But I would have you gentlemen know that we are living in the Twentieth Century—not the Middle Ages—and that even in royal alliances it is customary to at least ascertain the desires of the woman before sending out the invitations to the wedding."

She had risen to her feet, a spot of angry color burning in each cheek. Perforce, the men rose also.

"I beg of you, Miss Carlos—" Allerton was beginning, but with an imperious wave of her hand she cut him short.

"You need not!" she cried. "Here and now, with these gentlemen as my witnesses, I decline absolutely to marry you! I cannot believe that you knew nothing of all these plans! The coincidence is too remarkable. But if you have thought to trap me, you are mistaken!

"If my country has need of me, I am at her service; but I will serve her alone! I will be the Empress Maria, if it be her wish—but never the wife of the Emperor Juan the First."

She flung back her head, while her eyes sparkled angrily. Norton was looking at her with undisguised admiration; and, as her eyes met his, he nodded emphatic approval of the stand she had taken.

Allerton, however, was otherwise affected by her words. He saw in her only a very pretty and undeniably charming young woman whose head had been completely turned by the unexpected possibility of her metamorphosis from a simple English girl into the ruler of an empire, albeit a small and almost unknown one; and he interpreted her pose in his own mind as "a play to the gallery."

There was a tinge of contempt in his tone, therefore, as he replied to her somewhat melodramatic speech.

"Before the Princess Maria declines to be the wife of Juan the First," he said dryly, "it might be as well to wait until that position has been offered to her."

The girl caught her breath with a little gasp, and Norton seized Allerton by the shoulder and shook him roughly. It hardly needed this reminder, however, to convince the latter that his speech had been rather more than cruel. Before the words were well out of his mouth, he realized how they must have sounded to her.

Marie Carlos might be silly, theatrical; her attitude might smack of the cheap music-hall drama; but she was a woman with that innate sense of refinement and delicacy that goes with high birth and gentle breeding; and to her he must have appeared little short of a brute. He hastened to make amends.

"Forgive me," he said gently, as he saw her quivering lips and the hurt look in her eyes. "I did not mean to be unkind. But

it is not possible that you seriously contemplate entering into this?"

The girl did not reply; she only bit her lip, and turned her head away from him.

"Think what it means!" urged Allerton. "It is entirely out of the question to maintain an imperial government in this country of republics. To make the attempt to reestablish the empire would be to plunge the nation into a bloody civil war, and to bring down upon it the soldiers from the northern republic.

"Peace is Chilquitina's only safeguard. Internal dissension means only that the border-line of the northern republic will be extended again; and another extension will bring about the entire absorption of this state.

"I grant that the government here is being improperly carried on. But in this case the cure is worse than the disease. You are a woman, and you cannot understand these things. But ask any disinterested person—you will be told what I am trying to point out to you.

"I regret to attribute ulterior motives to these gentlemen"—he bowed ironically to the amazed group round the table—"but their action in urging this course upon you admits of no other explanation.

"Some one wants political chestnuts pulled out of the fire. Do not allow yourself to be made the cat's-paw. You will only expose yourself to humiliation, to international ridicule—"

"Stop!"

The girl's voice rang out like a bell.

"Do you think I could be made to suffer greater humiliation than that which I have been forced to endure to-night? Do you imagine that I could be made to feel more ridiculous, more—more—"

Her voice broke, but she shut her teeth firmly on the threatening sob and faced Allerton defiantly.

"You stand there and sneer," she rushed on stormily. "From your majestic height you look down upon me, and try to impress upon me how small and insignificant I appear to you!"

The greater part of the conversation had been carried on in English, and was thus, for the most part, unintelligible to the Chilquitinians and Don Miguel, who, however, understood plainly enough that there was a rift within the lute of their plans that threatened to still the imperial music forever.

"You mistake me," Allerton was beginning; but the girl would not allow him to continue. She wheeled on Don Roberto, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flushed.

"It must be one or the other!" she cried in Spanish. "Do you hear? You must choose between us! Emperor or empress! Which shall it be?"

"Do I understand from this, Mr. Allerton," exclaimed the general, "that you are willing to take your rightful place? That you have decided—"

Allerton's laugh checked him.

"I should say not!" returned the young man cheerily. "Why, general, I'm a citizen of the United States of America, as my father and grandfather were before me. Do you suppose for a moment that a real American would ever want to be anything else?

"Chilquitina drove us out—killed my great-grandfather as a proof of how much she thought of our family. I owe her no allegiance. Why should I pretend that I do?"

"Then you refuse?"

"I do. Absolutely and finally."

"But I do not!"

Marie Carlos's voice thrilled exultantly.

"But I do not refuse! General Zella—Don Miguel—when you are ready, you will find me in my apartments. I shall be waiting there, ready to serve my country as long as she needs me."

She turned and swept to the door. Norton sprang forward and opened it for her. She gave him a dazzling smile, hesitated for an instant, and then held out her hand.

Like a courtier of old, Norton pressed his lips respectfully upon it, and then stood aside, bowing as she passed from the room.

Allerton smiled grimly as he witnessed the little scene.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, picking up his hat, "I will bid you good evening. One thing more, however. This absurd comedy must not go on. Do you understand me clearly? Must not!

"You may be able to make a puppet of an inexperienced girl whose mind you have filled with fairy stories of imperial splendors, but you cannot make me dance when you pull the strings.

"Your word of honor, general, that this stops here and now—or I shall take steps to see that it does. The government knows how to deal with those who plot treason."

An imprecation burst from the *don;* but with steely eyes the general bent toward Allerton.

"And what assurance have we that you will not betray our plans to Perez, in any event? How do we know that you will not seek to curry favor with him by exposing us?" he demanded in a low, tense voice.

"The word of an American gentleman," replied Allerton promptly. "You give me your promise to abandon any attempt to establish an imperial government, and I shall give you mine that what has been here to-night shall never be mentioned outside this room.

"I speak for Mr. Norton, too," he added. "If any one is the rightful Emperor of Chilquitina, I am he! And during my lifetime none other, man or woman, shall sit upon the throne."

"And you refuse?"

"I do."

"You will not reconsider?"

Again Allerton laughed.

"Man, I'm an American citizen!" he said; and, apparently, he felt that this was a sufficient reason.

The general drew a long, quivering breath.

"My poor people!" he said. "This is the end of my hopes for them."

"You consent to this monstrous agreement?"-snarled the *don*.

The general bowed his head.

"I have no choice," he said sadly. "Should Perez receive an inkling of our plans we cannot hope to succeed. Señor Allerton is, as he says, the legitimate successor to the throne; and unless he abdicates, no one else can occupy it while he lives. There is no other way."

The *don* laughed—an ugly, sneering laugh.

"While he lives!" he said, and there was a significant emphasis upon the first word.

"But there is another way. Say but the word and this man shall never betray us!"

He struck his open palm sharply upon the table thrice, and in an instant the room seemed full of soldiers in the red and blue uniform of the republic, but wearing a flat, seven-pointed gilt crown bound upon the left arm.

"Say but the word," cried the *don* again, "and he shall never trouble us again!"

(To be continued.)

The Clairvoyance of Mrs. Thunder.

BY FORREST HALSEY.

The Spirit World Turns a Couple of Handsprings and Flops Itself into a Matrimonial Muddle.

"I SEE you—" said Mrs. Thunder dreamily.

"No, you don't," shouted Mr. Thunder, his face turning pale.

"I see you a settin' in a parlor. A woman sets beside you."

"She didn't set beside me!" shouted her husband. "You stop it—"

Mrs. Thunder's large frame gave a shudder. Her eyes were tight shut.

Mrs. Thunder was an uncanny figure.

"Now she draws nearer—a smile of cunnin' is on her face. She says—"

"She didn't say nothin'. We was only talkin' about her garden. I never went into the house at all. Stop it—"

Mrs. Thunder's hand went to her brow.

"Ah, I see clearer now. You are standing beside a fence. With a cruel look on her face she is luring you to talk about simple things, well knowin' that you are too much of a fool to see the awful schemes which is depictured on her heart—"

"We was only talkin' gardens."

"I hear the words flowers spoke."

"It was about weeds."

"An' then she leads you on. An' you forgettin' your own lawful wedded wife."

"I never forgot you for a minnit."

"Your own lawful wedded wife," continued the dull voice. "You are giving advice about weeds to a woman, an' a widder, while your lawful wedded wife is being scalded by the teapot, because her clairvoyance come to her at the minute she was pourin' it out for your supper, an' seeing the dreadful scene, natural feelin's was too much for her to have an' hold the handle at the same time. I see a dreadful doom hangin' over you. Clouds enwelop you—I hear a woman laughin' a cruel, widow laugh—an' a true wife sobbin'.

"But it's too late. Crowds of voices is cryin' out that you are a traitor—"

Mr. Thunder shook at the knees.

"I hear terrible things. Oh, be warned, Henery Thunder! My control is beggin' of you to be warned! Leave off the evil in your thoughts—"

"I ain't got no evil in my thoughts. It's that darn control of yours."

"Attack not the lone protection of a deserted wife! Be warned! I see you!"

But Henry Thunder had fled into the night.

Down the lonely street sped Mr. Thunder. The street was uncanny, ghostly. Huge trees bent above it. From a far pond frogs croaked, ghastly croakings. Far away, in a farmyard beyond the town, a watch-dog bayed at the moon.

Mr. Thunder ran faster.

Cold dews bathed his brow. Spirits of the night whispered at his shoulders. Suddenly a little oblong of warm lamplit window broke the darkness.

With shaking hands Mr. Thunder tore open the shoemaker's cottage door.

"Bill," gasped Mr. Thunder, "she's got it ag'in!"

Bill raised a face that looked as if nature had started out to make it an apple and decided at last to make it a fox, from the shoe on his knee.

"She ain't," said Bill with sorrow and resignation. "Which I ain't surprised at—knowin' women."

"She has," Mr. Thunder wiped a wet brow, and seated his small, and somewhat time-withered, person on the shoemaker's bench.

"Who is it to-night?" said Bill, laying down the awl.

"That durned Indian, Little Scalplock," replied Mr. Thunder, groping under the bench.

"Little more to the right, Henery," said Bill.

Mr. Thunder produced a bottle labeled "Old Doctor Peters's Harmless Heart Exhilarator," and drank.

"Knowin' women as I do," said Bill, waxing a thread. "Knowin' women as all shoemakers must, I ain't surprised." He rubbed some wax on the new red leather sole and continued:

"Shoemakers has got a chancet to look right into women. This woman here," he hit the new sole with a horny finger, "has brought in this very shoe four times to be half-soled, to say nothin' of the heels she has made me put on. An' whose shoe is it? Her husband's, of course. An' whose shoes is she wearin'? A pair, new, too, from the Richmond Store, on Main Street. That's women: New soles for husbands; new shoes for her. Hear me say it ag'in, an' remember it, Henery, that's women."

He paused.

No sound broke the stillness but the gurgle of the "Harmless Heart Exhilarator" down the withered throat of Mr. Thunder.

"Now, Henery," said Bill at last, "if you feel stronger, tell me about it."

Mr. Thunder gazed nervously over his shoulder. The little room was only the size of a pocket, and bright with the yellow, warm light of the lamp hung above the bench, but Mr. Thunder had come in contact with the unseen world.

Mr. Thunder had grown to distrust everything. Well he knew that walls had ears.

The shoemaker picked up the awl.

"Begin at the beginnin', Henery," he said, "an' don't leave nothin' out. Otherwise I may not be able to catch hold of no idea to help you."

The shoemaker had heard the tale since it's inception, but like the law, things had to be repeated all over each time they came before him. Only, unlike the law, the repetition did not cost money, and further gave ease of mind to the victim who sought relief.

"Begin at the start," said the shoemaker.

Mr. Thunder drew a breath between set teeth.

"The start come, when I brung her home that book that Luce Henmaker got with his edition of the Sunday paper.

"'How To Be a Clairvoyant, by Our Own Medium,' was the name onto it."

The shoemaker shook his head.

"Why did you give it to her, Henery?" said the shoemaker.

Mr. Thunder groaned.

"I thought it was a new kind er cook-book," said Mr. Thunder.

"That's what comes of bein' kind to women," said the shoemaker. "Take it from me, Henery, an' remember it is me that says it, never be kind to women. Because if they want you to be kind to them, they'll make you be kind to them, and if they don't want you to be, be glad of the peace you got, an' remember to let sleeping dogs lie. Go on."

"Well, at first I didn't mind. She scaret me once just before election, w'en she went into a trancet an' tolt me that it was all over with the country because George Washington had come to her an' tolt her that he see Teddy with a crown on his head, an' his feet on the necks of the Constitution of the United States—"

"I remember; other people seen that, too, an' they was more alive than George Washington, or thought so," said Bill.

Mr. Thunder sighed.

"Well, I didn't mind, George. Besides, fer a man that never tolt a lie in life, the things he tolt that woman in death showed to my mind that a big change had come over him somehow."

"We can never tell, any of us, where we will go when we die," said Bill sadly.

"No, I didn't mind George, er Isabella of Spain—though she tried hard to make trouble by sayin' I had lost the bill I let old Nicknicker run up on me. She made me go collect the fourteen dollars he had offen me fer feed. An' he ain't never forgot it, neither. An' if ever another feed-store opens in Ameliaville, I'll lose him.

"No, I didn't mind Isabella none, because she was about as wrong as George. But when this durned Indian Little Scalp-lock took my wife in hand, he seemed to know things."

Mr. Thunder glanced over his shoulder again, leaned toward the shoemaker, and whispered:

"Either one thing or the other has to happen. Either that blame Indian is shook free of my wife, or my wife I'll shake free o' me."

The shoemaker punched the auger through the sole.

"You set tight, Henery," said the shoemaker. "Perhaps your wife will be shook free of you. Perhaps that Indian is a friend in disguise. Live Indians has been known to have hearts. Dead ones may have 'em, too."

"Bill," said Mr. Thunder sadly, "when a woman like my wife shakes free from a man, it's like a terrier shakin' free from a rat. The rat'll git free sooner er later, but he ain't ever the same rat ag'in. No, this Indian has gotta git out, an' you gotta help me git him."

The shoemaker put down the finished boot, took the bottle of "Harmless Heart Exhilarator," drank, wiped his lips on his sleeve, and said:

"Can't be did."

"Bill!" cried Mr. Thunder in the tones of Cæsar to Brutus.

"No—I will face all the Indians that was ever deaded fer you, Henery; but when it comes to facin' Mary Ann Thunder—it can't be did."

"I don't want you to face her. I want you to see the Widow Winwater fer me."

The shoemaker turned a cold eye on the pleading Mr. Thunder.

"Henery Thunder, w'at is between you an' the Widow Winwater?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," said Mr. Thunder miserably. "But that blame Indian has got my wife on the war-path. An' you gotta see the widow."

"Why have *you* gotta see the widow, an' you a married man, Henery Thunder?"

Mr. Thunder glanced nervously about.

"I—I let her have three dollars, an' she's payin' it back fifty cents at a time. I gotta see her."

His friend gazed at him.

"I can't think how it happened," wailed Mr. Thunder. "It was while Mary Ann was to her mother's at Banstaple. She, the widow, come to me in the store, an' before I knowed it she had that three dollars.

"Perhaps she's been studyin' how to be a clairvoyant, too, an' lifted it outer me by supernatural power. An' now she's always sendin' me word to come to her house fer a quarter er a half dollar. An' thet durned Indian has found it out, an' he is tellin' my wife about it."

"Has he told her you lent the Widow Winwater three dollars?"

Mr. Thunder turned ghastly pale.

"No, Bill, 'cause I wouldn't be a live man if he had."

"Then, w'at's the harm if he hain't?"

"Harm! The durned, sneakin', red-skinned cuss just turns on one of them trances every time I got to go to the widder's, an' shows my wife all thet happens. Bill, it's awful. I can't move a foot toward the widder's but what when I come back I find Mary Ann has been seein' me, an' if she finds out about that money—"

Mr. Thunder paused, overcome.

The shoemaker's heart melted.

"What do you want me to do, Henery?"

Mr. Thunder sat up. Light gleamed in his eyes.

"The next time she sends fer me," said Mr. Thunder, "I want you to go an' git the quarter. Nobody, dead or alive, could think a woman would be makin' up to you, Bill."

The shoemaker stiffened. His breath came in short gasps.

"I mean, Bill," said his friend hurriedly, "that the way you see through women first look would show anybody—even an Indian—that none of 'em could ever ketch you."

The shoemaker smiled.

"I will say this fer you, Henery, you ain't the absolute durn fool that any one who had seen the wife you married would think you was," said the shoemaker.

"Will you do it, Bill?" said Mr. Thunder, after a pause and gulp.

The shoemaker took off his apron.

"I'll think about it, Henery," he said. "An' while I'm thinkin' about it I'll put in the horse to the buggy an' we'll drive over to Belden. There is a show in Belden tonight. Henery Henfettle tolt me."

He paused.

"That is, if you kin git off," he added.

"I kin git off. This is sewin'-circle night," said Mr. Thunder. "But you will do it, Bill?" he added piteously.

The shoemaker put on his coat.

"Henery," he said solemnly, "don't never forget that it is me that says it—afore a man gits into the ring with a widder, fer any purse whatever, he had oughter have time to think. I'll be thinkin' while we are drivin' to Belden.

"And Henery, if I should take on the widder, I say it, and you are to keep it in your mind, that widder is going to be did. Between me, an' women, an' widows, there is, has been, an' always will be, nothin' but war."

He crowned himself with an ancient derby, and led the way to the barn.

During the dark drive to Belden the shoemaker's mind was working.

The shoemaker's mind was a ponderous and mighty machine, and when it revolved grunts and growls came from the interior of the shoemaker. Judging from the noises that came from his friend's machinery, Mr. Thunder knew that a decision had not been reached when they topped the last hill and saw the scattered lights of Belden amid the dark of trees.

The grunts did not cease as they drove down the hill. They continued as they entered Main Street, which gleamed with the electric luster of the signs above the opera-house and Dirk Winker's cigar-store; they continued as they drove up to the knot of people about the post-office.

Suddenly they ceased.

"Henery," cried the shoemaker, "what is that?"

Mr. Thunder looked, sprang up in the buggy, looked again over the knot of heads about something.

"Let me at the durned skunk!" cried Mr. Thunder in a rage, and sprang from the vehicle.

The shoemaker sprang after him, and seized him.

"Be calm, Henery," said the shoemaker.

"I won't be calm," shouted Mr. Thunder. "I am goin' to et that polecat alive. I'm goin' to tear the livin' hide offen him." He shook a wizened arm in the direction of the crowd. "I am goin' to make him et his own ears an' say he likes 'em."

"W'at harm has he ever done you?"

"Harm!" screamed Mr. Thunder. "Ain't he an Indian?"

"Gentlemen," said a voice from the center of the crowd, "I am offering tonight to your intelligent attention the greatest remedy known to man—or woman—Dr. Goler's Indian Swamp-Root, a secret discovery treasured for years in the tribe of the Shawnits, now given to the world for the first time by the unparalleled philanthropy of the good Dr. Goler. One package will prolong life for—"

"Henery," cried the shoemaker, "I gotta idea. Come with me, Henery."

He dragged Mr. Thunder round the corner from Main Street. Instantly they were alone.

"Henery," said the shoemaker, after some violent wrestling, "do you believe that your wife really thinks she believes in that Indian—Little Scalp-lock?"

"Believes in him!" panted Mr. Thunder. "Of course. Don't he tell her every time I go to see the widder?"

"I know, but no man can put no trust in women. Now, it strikes me that the thing that would cure Mary Ann Thunder of ever wantin' to see spirits ag'in, would be to see one."

Mr. Thunder stood still.

Mr. Thunder's jaw dropped.

"W'at's that, Bill?" said Mr. Thunder.

The shoemaker leaned over and whispered: "Suppose that some night, when Mary Ann Thunder was callin' on Little Scalp-lock to tell her about you an' the widder, Little Scalp-lock should bound inter the room an' tell her never to doubt her husband again; that there wasn't no purer-minded man to be found nowheres than her husband, an' that widders was as grass in his sight.

"Then, don't you see, she'd be so scared she'd be afeared to call on the spirits ever after, an' you could git the rest of that three dollars from the widder, an' I wouldn't have to be mixed up in it. Fer I don't mind tellin' you, Henery, an' it's me that says it, that a man hadn't ought to expose himself to widders unless he's a married man an' done with life, anyway."

Some time later Mr. Thunder and the shoemaker were seen talking earnestly to the Indian.

Later they returned home.

"You got a great brain, Bill, if I do say so," said Mr. Thunder as they parted.

The shoemaker looked in pity at his friend.

"No one could ha' said but yours might ha' been a little better if you hadn't married, an' got it squelched," he said.

Mr. Thunder turned sadly away.

Suddenly the shoemaker hailed him.

"How do you know it will be to-morrow night?" said the shoemaker.

"Because I am going to see the widder to-morrow afternoon," he replied.

The shades of night had fallen the day after as Mr. Thunder entered his castle, or, rather, the yard of his castle. He hesitated long before opening his door, nor could he find the strength to do so until ordered to by a voice that came mysteriously from out of a lilac-bush under the kitchen window.

The moment Mr. Thunder opened the kitchen door he shuddered. There is a power in the human eye that is simply uncanny. And when the human eye is set in the head of a wife and turned upon a guilty husband, the limits of all human power have been reached.

Mrs. Thunder's eyes were fixed on her husband.

Not a word was spoken for five minutes.

The wife's eyes spoke, and that was enough.

"Supper ready?" said Mr. Thunder, repressing a tendency to scream with fright.

Mrs. Thunder shuddered.

"He kin ast fer vittles—vittles his own lawful wedded wife has cooked. He kin ast fer them."

Mrs. Thunder's eyes looked up at the ceiling as though to call the recording angel's attention to the unheard-of crime.

"He kin ask fer them, when he ought to be lyin' struck dead, with no thought of vittles or of nothin' but of meetin' his final judgment w'en the graves give up their dead an' widders is exposed."

"I was only down to the store," trembled Mr. Thunder.

"He was only down to the store," continued his wife, addressing the angel in the ceiling. "He was only down to the store! If that was all he was down to, his heart would not be a tremblin' at this moment, when he knows he was tryin' to blind his lawful wedded wife that had ought to be let cook vittles in peace, instead of seein' sights as drove all thoughts of vittles from her heart, so that she hadn't the strength to as much as lift a stove-lid. But well he knows she has seed him, an' well he knows she has one to look out for her an' show her what is happenin'. I feel it a comin' now. Strange thrills is comin' in my back."

She closed her eyes.

Behind her the window began to open.

"Strange tremors is creepin' inter my body. Who is it that is a comin' inter this room. Who is it that speaks to the wife as is bein' trod by the feet of widows?"

"It is Little Scalp-lock," said a deep voice.

Mrs. Thunder's eyes flew open.

Tall, hideous and revoltingly terrible, a great Indian in war-paint stood beside her.

With a blood-curdling shriek, Mrs. Thunder clutched her husband. "Save me, Henery," she shrieked.

Henry Thunder's face was calm, his voice brave:

"Mary Ann," he said soothingly, "don't take on so. What's the matter?"

"There! There!" His wife's shaking finger pointed at the tall Indian in the towering war-bonnet. "Oh, the powers of evil has got us. See him."

Mr. Thunder's eyes roved the room.

"Be calm. There ain't nothin'—here. I can't see nothin'," said the cool Mr. Thunder.

Mrs. Thunder screamed and fell on her knees.

"I have trafficked with the evil one. A Indian has came fer me. Save me, Henery!"

"From who? There ain't nobody to save you from, Mary Ann," said the brave husband.

Over her bowed head he winked at the Indian.

"Woman," said the Indian, "I have come to warn you. This very night you are in danger."

"Go away," screamed Mrs. Thunder. "Read a few passengers out of the Scripture to him, Henery. Oh, I swear I will never do it ag'in if the Lord will let me off this time."

A pleased expression spread over Mr. Thunder's wrinkles.

"Madam," said the deep voice of the Indian, "be not afraid. I am your friend. I have come to tell you to lose no time. Your husband is about to run off with the Widder Winwater—"

"Hey," yelled Mr. Thunder, and sprang into the air.

"Even now she waits for him. Run quickly. Take him with you. Don't let him out of your sight for half a minute. Confront him with the widder, and see that I speak the truth."

"You liar, doggasted, thievin', Indian liar," yelled Mr. Thunder.

Mrs. Thunder sprang to her feet.

Mrs. Thunder seized her husband's wrist.

Mrs. Thunder's eyes blazed.

"W'at's that?" yelled Mrs. Thunder.

"A lie," cried Mr. Thunder.

"The truth," said the Indian. "Even now their partner in this crime—a man—I think he is a shoemaker, crouches beneath that window."

There was the sound of crashing bushes, then feet ran into the night.

"Henery Thunder!" cried his wife. "You come with me. Indian or no Indian, I'll see about this."

"Wait a bit, Mary Ann," wailed Mr. Thunder.

"Go," said the Indian.

Mrs. Thunder went.

So did Mr. Thunder.

Down the hill they flew. The earth, spurned by their swiftly flying feet, whirled behind them.

They took a corner on a flying wheel that nearly threw Mr. Thunder off his balance; but for the iron hand that clutched his wrist he would have fallen.

Breathlessly they dashed into a little door-yard. Their feet rattled up the broad steps.

"Open this door, you schemin', thievin' cat of a widow," shouted Mrs. Thunder, beating on the panels with her free hand.

"Heaven has spoke to me, an' your plots is exposed. Open this door quick, till I tear every hair from your head."

Strange to say, the door did not open to this invitation.

The house remained dark.

"Here's my husband," screamed the poor wife. "Open this door an' take him away from me. Run away with him, if you dare. You kilt one an' now you are lookin' fer another to devour, Anna Condor."

"Mis' Winwater ain't to hum," said a female voice from over the fence.

"Where is she, then?" screamed the poor wife. "Tell me where she is, Minnie Jane Spink."

"She has went to the station," said Minnie Jane Spink.

Mrs. Thunder gave a loud laugh.

"So that was the place you was to meet her? Come with me an' meet her, you boarconstrictor!"

She sprang down the steps.

Mr. Thunder tumbled after her.

"Wait," said Minnie Jane Spink.

"Why?" said Mrs. Thunder.

"Because," said Minnie Jane Spink, "Mis' Winwater has went away to be married."

"What?" cried Mrs. Thunder.

"Yep, to little Sammy Teafinger. You see, Sammy has been gettin' madder an' madder w'en he see Mr. Thunder callin' so regular. You know I always tolt you when your husband called, Mrs. Thunder.

"Well, this afternoon he come in after your husband had went away. You remember I tolt you how your husband was here this afternoon, Mis' Thunder, an' Sammy tolt her he wanted to marry her an' protect her from awful fellers like your husband, an' so that she wouldn't change her mind, he's tooken her over to Bassington to splice

her tight. Besides, he tolt her he had to git a new harrow at Bassington to once.

"I was listening at the hedge, an' Sammy talks louder than your husband, so I could ketch what he says clear. The end of it was she went. I bet you that widder has been only usin' your husband to ketch Sammy. An', oh, Mr. Thunder, before she left she gave me a dollar an' a quarter to give to you. An' she says thank you. You never will know how that loan of three dollars helped her out. Here it is."

"Henery Thunder," said his wife, "have you been lendin' the widder money?"

Mr. Thunder shook again.

"Yes," he faltered, "an' she was payin' it back by halfs an' quarters."

Mrs. Thunder said nothing—that awful matrimonial nothing that is louder than war-trumpets. She took the dollar and a quarter from his trembling hand, placed it in a safe place—beyond the reach of the hands of men or husbands—and started home.

Mr. Thunder also started home, but at a safe distance.

In terrible silence they mounted the hill.

In terrible silence they turned the corner.

In silence they reached the gate of the Thunders.

Then suddenly Mrs. Thunder stopped.

Mr. Thunder recoiled.

Suddenly he was seized.

"Henery," cried his wife. Terror shook her voice. "Oh, Henery, husband, I forgot him."

"Who?" said Mr. Thunder.

Mrs. Thunder was weeping and clinging to him.

"That Indian. Oh, Henery, he is in there. Oh, Henery, I am a wicked woman. I hev been in league with the powers of darkness. If I see them awful feathers ag'in I shall die. Let's run for the minister."

Then a beautiful thing happened, a thing that ever after gave to Mr. Thunder statue and dignity in his wife's eyes. Mr. Thunder shook with rage. His face was convulsed with the fighting light. He waved his fists.

"Let me at that lyin' redskin, woman," shouted Mr. Thunder.

In spite of her wails and tears he burst from her arms and boldly ran into the house.

But the Indian was gone.

So also was twenty dollars and a silver watch.

"Woman," said Mr. Thunder sternly an hour later as he fed the fire with "How To Be a Clairvoyant," "woman, let this teach you never to have nothin' to do with no men dead or alive but your husband."

"No, Henery," said Mrs. Thunder meekly. "And Henery."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tolt me that you was goin' to the widder's to git back your money?"

"Why?"

"Because I know you would go anywhere in Kingdom Come to git back a quarter."

A SONG OF THE SOUTH

UNDER the pendulous leaves of the palm
Drowsy I dream in the odorous calm;
Dreams of delight and of rapture
I capture
Out of the bower of the bloom and the balm.

Over me carols a bird on the bough—
Passionate melody, amorous vow;
All of his happy song spells me,
And tells me:
"Fly to her, lover, and speak to her now!"

Sweetheart, I send you the song of the bird;
Dared I interpret the message I heard
This were the whisper above you:
"I love you!"
This were the music, the secret, the word!"

Julian Durand.

The Fake Doctor.

BY JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE.

Author of "The Townsend Protégés," "Carbines and Sabers," Etc.

A Starving Pauper, a Stern Papa, and a Strenuous Person Affect a Situation Unique in Medical History.

(Complete in This Number.)

PROLOGUE.

"I'VE talked all I'm goin' ter. You give me ten dollars on yer rent by to-morrow mornin' or yer git out, bag 'n' baggage, by to-morrow night. 'N' believe me, I'm not handin' yer no merry jest! Yer'll git when I says yer'll git, 'f I has ter call a cop ter chuck out yer truck!"

The irate landlady, Mrs. Johnson, stood in the hall outside the top-floor front, with arms akimbo and grim resolution writ large upon her expansive countenance.

Caspar Lessing, gentleman of languid leisure without warrant, stood just within the open door, *tête-à-tête* with his relentless hostess.

"This is very painful, Mrs. Johnson," he said, his rich bass voice mellowed with gentle pathos. "It grieves me more than I can tell you to have any unpleasantness with you. You have been so kind to me, you know. Before taking these inexpensive quarters in your excellent house I was accustomed to living in the best hotels of the country; but you, madam, have made this a home for me. Though painfully reduced in circumstances, I have been—well—happy here."

"Hand the blarney to th' marines!" shouted the lady, refusing to be mollified by the tactful blandishments. "The on'y line o' talk I want from you, young man, is money. Th' real stuff right 'n m' hand."

"I see. I dare say I have tried your patience sorely," said Lessing. "I am rather helpless at present, Mrs. Johnson, but I will see what can be done. I will see some of my friends. You shall have some money, if I can raise it."

"That line o' talk has got hair on it!" sniffed the lady. "But go ahead with yer con games. Go's far as yer like. I'm wise to yer. An' I might's well call the cop now and have 'im ready."

She turned and ambled away to hurl disciplinary menaces at other delinquent lodgers. Caspar Lessing shut the door, smiled dryly, and lighted a cigarette.

The same day he called at the office of a friend.

"Hallo, Caspar! What's wrong?" asked the friend, noting the halting, timorous air of embarrassment.

"My dear old fellow," replied Caspar warmly, "I've been wanting to see you for a deuce of a while. And to-day I ran afoul of some unpleasant incidents, you know, and you're such a good-natured chap—"

"How much, Caspar?" inquired the friend politely, but with something akin to weariness.

Caspar smiled apologetically.

"If you're at all hard-up, old man," he said considerately, "why, a little matter of ten dollars will ease me up a good deal. Of course—"

The friend hastened to produce a ten-dollar note. "I'm glad to be able to help you out, Caspar," he said, "but this is positively the last. I have to consider my own financial affairs very carefully to make both ends meet, and I can't keep up this sort of thing forever, you know."

Lessing was a bit hurt, but he explained his difficulties with some pathos; and, his errand being accomplished, he made a dignified departure, marveling that a man with a comfortable income could find so little pleasure in aiding a less fortunate fellow.

Being in a mood for reflection, and wishing to calm his ruffled spirits after the contact with the man of affairs, he walked for a while on Fifth Avenue.

Penniless as he was, he managed always to be well attired; and as he sauntered through the crowds the aura of class hovered over him, and he breathed the air of those accustomed to all the refinements and privileges of the wealthy.

Bitterness came to him as he mused upon his finances.

After he had given the ten dollars to the greedy, grasping landlady, he would have left in his purse barely enough to purchase a miserable supper at the dairy-lunch place near his lodging-house. He had formerly enjoyed the doubtful comfort of regular table-board at the lodging-house; but the woman had refused him further credit in the matter of food, and he was at his wits' ends for that important item of daily life.

It was near dusk, and, as the season was autumn, dusk meant dinner or its equivalent. Just ahead of him loomed the sparkling lights of one of the city's great restaurants, a haven—yes, a heaven—for gourmets.

It had been weeks, he reflected, since he had eaten as a gentleman should; and but for the heartless tyranny of the money-grubbing landlady, the ten dollars in his pocket might pay for a dinner of some distinction—a dinner such as a person of taste requires, not only for his stomach's sake, but for the good of his immortal soul.

He swung his walking-stick with vicious slashes and laughed bitterly at his reflections on the injustices of the world.

He passed with lagging steps the windows of the restaurant, and when he came opposite the bronze and crystal entrance some strange, irresistible force arrested his progress and turned him toward the music and lights of the interior.

Resistance is fatuous against such odds, and Lessing laughed again aloud and strode forward into the place of exquisite napery and silver, and handed his hat and stick to the obsequious buttons with all the grandeur of a duke.

The die was cast, and what cared he? Was he not living in the present, like a good philosopher? The landlady, the rental, and all other disgusting, sordid things were matters of the morrow. To-day was the time to be considered to the exclusion of all to-morrows.

He won the waiter's unqualified respect with the discriminating order that he gave; and he felt, as he settled himself in his chair, that this was his natural setting.

At one of the adjacent tables two men were dining, with such evidences of lavishness as bottles in tubs of ice, and elaborately garnished viands. One of them was scarcely a yard from Lessing's elbow, and he scowled resentfully as he realized that their conversation was more audible than refined.

"And you sail by the Colossus to-morrow?" said the blond man at Lessing's elbow.

"Yes. We closed the house at Ardmuir yesterday," replied the other man, who was dark and palpably opulent.

"By Jove! it seems a shame to close up such a house," said the first speaker. "If I had such a house, I'd stay in it winter and summer. It's too deucedly comfortable and all that to let it go to waste six months in the year."

"That's it," reflected Lessing as he delicately approached a canapé of caviar. "It's too bad for a place like that—whatever it is—to go to waste. Here am I, a gentleman suffering and pining for the refinements of my class, condemned to languish in a cold, cheerless lodging-house, not fit for a scissors-grinder. There's the blasted injustice of things again."

"If you feel that way about it," went on the dark man, "why don't you run up and use the place when you like? We've left everything there but the servants. Old Joel Tubbs, the postmaster and village factotum, is looking after the place for me, and he has the keys.

"When you feel like it, take a run up there—it's grand when the weather's good. Tubbs will get his wife or some one to cook for you and keep things going right, and you'll find all the comforts of home. It'll do the place good to have somebody use it. It simply rusts and mildews when it stands empty."

"Thanks! I'd jolly well like to do that—" began the blond man.

"I'd jolly well like to, also," thought Lessing.

"But I'm a busy man," continued the blond man. "We can't all be luxurious, globe-trotting physicians, you know. But I do love a country house. What if I should run up there for a week's shooting? Wouldn't the old postmaster chap look upon me with suspicion?"

"Oh, no; he's a nice, easy-going old fellow. And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you an order for him. Just drop in there any time, show him my signature, and he'll give you the freedom of the town."

"That's mighty good of you, Whitcomb," said the blond man. "I really don't know that I'll have a minute to get away from town this winter, but I'd certainly like nothing better."

"Whitcomb — Whitcomb," now mused Lessing.

And then it came to him that this was Henry F. Whitcomb, the well-known society physician, with town house and offices on the avenue and a country estate at Ardmuir.

Dr. Whitcomb called a waiter and asked for a piece of paper. He spent a few moments in scribbling something on the paper, and then passed it across the table to the blond man.

"That makes you the master of the house as long as you care to stay there," he said.

The other man scanned the paper and murmured some pleasant expressions of gratitude. Then he carelessly dropped it on the table by his plate.

"Your town house is closing up, too, I suppose," he said, by way of further conversation.

"Oh, yes; you see, we'll be abroad till spring," answered the doctor. "The whole family's going, you know. My daughter Stella is not keen about it—she'd rather stay in town. There's a young whippersnapper that lives up at Ardmuir who is her principal trouble just now, and, incidentally, *my* principal anxiety. Just between us, that's the chief cause of this emigration to Europe. She'll meet some new ones over there and lose interest in the young cub by the time we get back."

So the two men continued to talk, eat, and quaff the bubbling stuff from the long-stemmed glasses.

Presently, by an inadvertent movement of the elbow, the blond man poked the scrap of paper off the table, and it fluttered almost to Lessing's feet.

With instinctive courtesy, he stooped to pick it up and return it. But a sudden inspiration seized him. The men were unconscious of his presence, and the waiters were not looking at the moment. He grasped the scrap of paper and quickly resumed his position, slipping the paper under his napkin.

Dr. Whitcomb called the waiter, and renewed his wine order.

"Heaven send them all the wine they can drink!" thought Lessing. "It brings forgetfulness."

The chatter and laughter of the two friends continued, and increased in volume. After an hour they rose boisterously and departed into the night, without a word or thought of the paper which had fluttered from the table. Such little courtesies are common among men of the class, and the matter of the tenantless country house had probably passed from their minds.

Lessing called for his coffee, lighted a cigarette, and gingerly proceeded to look at the prize—if he might regard it as such.

Scribbled across the paper, in the scrawl of the average physician, was the following message:

JOEL TUBBS, Postmaster, Ardmuir, N. Y.

DEAR JOEL:—This note will be handed to you by a personal friend of mine. He will occupy my house as long as he cares to, and you will oblige me by opening it for him and showing him every courtesy and all assistance in your power. You may regard his orders as mine.

HENRY F. WHITCOMB.

A slow, sweet smile played over the handsome features of Caspar Lessing as he folded the scrap of paper and placed it tenderly in his thin wallet.

"Thank fortune, the doddering idiot didn't have the sense or courtesy to put in his friend's name," he murmured softly. "For once in your checkered life, Caspar, Fate herself smiles upon you."

CHAPTER I.

FOR A REST.

"KNOW the house? Ever been here before?" inquired Joel Tubbs, the elderly postmaster and storekeeper of Ardmuir, as he fitted a key in the front door of the handsome Dutch Colonial country house of Dr. Whitcomb.

"No. This is my first visit to Ardmuir," said Caspar Lessing truthfully.

Then, lying handsomely, he added: "Dr. Whitcomb has often invited me here, but I've been a very busy man. Now, I've got to take a rest, and I don't see how any place could be better for it than this."

Joel Tubbs threw open the heavy door and stood aside for the visitor to enter.

"I s'pose you're a doctor, too?" he said as Caspar stepped nonchalantly upon the polished floor and Persian carpet of the entrance-hall.

"Er—oh, yes," answered Caspar carelessly. "I'm not practising at present. Dr. Whitcomb has gone to Europe for a rest, and I—well, I am going to have a rest, too, and enjoy the comforts he has so kindly left behind for me."

"Be you a surgeon?" inquired the inquisitive countryman. "Or just a common, ord'nary doctor?"

Lessing smiled patiently, but did some rapid thinking as he realized the value of discretion under all circumstances.

"Why, I'm just a—a general practitioner, you know," he said easily.

"M-m!" muttered Joel, hardly satisfied.

They wandered through the rooms for a while, getting the lay of the place. Lessing, cool and critical, commented favorably upon the household arrangements and the decorative features with the air of one born to such surroundings.

"This is the doc's study," said Tubbs, opening the door of a room of bookcases, tables, and desks. "He don't do much doct'rin' round here, but he keeps a lot o' tools and medicine stuff in here. Sometimes people come up to see 'im from the city. He's too high-priced for the folks round the village, but some o' the summer people here gets 'im to take care of 'em—them as can afford it.

"He's a right fine feller, though. If he hears of any one sufferin', that can't afford havin' a doctor, he picks up his bag and starts right off to 'tend to 'em. An' he gives 'em just as good treatment as if they was rich folks."

"That is only right. It is the ethics of the profession," declared Lessing sententiously.

"He's done a good deal fer me and my fambly," continued the postmaster, with a touch of suggestion in his voice. "When he's here he's always fixin' me up with somethin' or other. I wish he was here now.

"I've been a takin' on with mis'ry in my old back fer a week or more. He came up to close the house and take the fambly away; but he was so busy and flustered, I didn't have the gall to bother 'im. Seems sometimes I'd most have ter give up my work when that mis'ry gets me."

Lessing awoke with a start to the fact that something was required of him. In a regrettably weak moment he had saddled himself with a dangerous responsibility.

He walked about the study and looked over the books and cases, medicines and instruments, with an affected familiarity. Suddenly his eye lighted upon some large bottles of white tablets. They were labeled as compounds for the treatment of various common maladies. A quick survey of them showed a label which read:

WYNAN'S RHEUMATISM COMP.

For Rheumatism, Gout, Lumbago, Etc.

Without undue haste the adventurer went carefully over the other bottles in the cabinet—bottles which bore labels, the legends of which were as Sanskrit to him.

"Are these all the drugs the doctor keeps here?" he inquired casually.

"I guess they are," said the man, eying the visitor with interest.

Lessing glanced over the case again, and then thoughtfully selected the bottle with the comprehensive label.

"We all differ a little, I suppose, in our choice of remedies for certain cases," he said with a commendably professional air, "but I am quite satisfied with this, and I believe it is the very thing Dr. Whitcomb would give you if he were here."

He uncorked the large bottle and shook a few of the tablets into a small paper box which he took from a drawer of empty pill-boxes and vials. There was a pen on the desk and he dipped it into the ink and wrote carefully upon the box-cover:

"Take one tablet three times a day."

"That will not be likely to kill the old chap, anyway," he thought anxiously, as he handed the box to the countryman.

"Thank you, doc," said Joel Tubbs. "I'll have ter be runnin' back to the store fer a spell now, but I'll be back again to

see what you need, an' I'll have the old woman come right over to make yer comfortable and put things in shape."

"I wish you would," replied Lessing. "I shall need at least one servant here, and I'll take a look round, after a while, to see what the house needs in general. I may be here for some time."

CHAPTER II.

A NEIGHBOR.

CASPAR LESSING had just finished a dainty luncheon of chops, salad, and tea, and sat in the elegant Georgian dining-room of the Whitcomb house, reading a New York paper annd glancing, from time to time, through the leaded panes of the mullioned windows at the ruddy autumn landscape.

With smiling appreciation he read the list of notables who had departed for foreign shores on the Colossus, and noted that the family of Dr. Henry F. Whitcomb would stay on the Continent most of the winter.

Caspar was living like a gentleman, which he regarded as only right and fitting. The enchanting dream could not go on forever, but Caspar, it will be noted, lived in the present.

The spring and the return of the Whitcombs were not matters of to-morrow or the next day. True, they might write some message to Joel Tubbs which would give the whole game away, or one of a hundred conceivable things of an untoward nature might happen, but Caspar laughed and blew smoke-wreaths at such abstractions, and wallowed in the comforts of the moment.

He had little or no money, but none was needed in the country hamlet. There was ample credit at the general store. Joel Tubbs would even send blithely to the city shops for anything too rich and rare to be carried in the rural stock. Caspar had already ordered fine cigars and cigarettes.

He had brought with him only a suitcase of such clothes as he was able to smuggle, under cover of the darkness, from the frowning lodging-house of Mrs. Johnson. But there was an excellent supply of haberdashery in the room and closets of Dr. Whitcomb, and Caspar lounged and luxuriated in silken pajamas and richly quilted dressing-gowns.

The swinging-door of the butler's pantry flapped quietly, and Tilly, the competent niece of Mrs. Joel Tubbs, who had contracted to "come in" and do the "housework" by the day, entered the room.

"Dr. Bemis, from over to Brimton, is at the door to see yer, sir," she said.

Caspar experienced a momentary spasm of apprehension, but it was now only momentary.

"Oh—ah—show him into the reception-room, Tilly," he said, without betraying his feelings of uncertainty.

Presently he laid down the paper, squared his shoulders, and walked into the room where the visitor waited.

"Ah," he said with handsome cordiality. "Dr. Bemis, I presume."

"How d'e do," responded the visitor, giving Lessing a cold and wrinkled hand.

He was a physician of the older "old school," garbed according to the vintage of the sixties or seventies, and he eyed Lessing with cold and critical scrutiny.

"I heard you was stopping here a spell," the doctor explained, "and that you was a city physician, so I thought I'd jest drop in on you. I'm over 'n the next town, Brimton."

Caspar pressed him into an easy chair and took one near him.

"That was mighty good of you," he said heartily. "I'm up here as—as Dr. Whitcomb's guest. Going to lie low and rest up a bit. We get it pretty stiff in the city, you know."

And then his cautious mind warned him of lurking dangers: such things as medical directories and tell-tales of the profession unknown to laymen, and he added quickly:

"But I don't practise in the city, you know. Oh, no, I'm a wild and woolly Westerner. Portland, Oregon, you see. But we get it just as strenuously out there. I ran away from business and came East, but I found your cities too much for a tired man, and this place appealed to me as the very spot for quiet and relaxation."

"I'm an eclectic. What school do you follow, if I may ask?" said the country doctor.

Lessing caught his breath and thought rapidly. He had not yet decided what he was.

"Well," he said, smiling with affected superiority, "I guess I am what you might call—a—well, a liberal, Dr. Bemis. Things have changed in the last few years, I'm sure you'll agree. The old school lines are

breaking down with all the other lines of partisanship.

"No North, no South; no Democrats, no Republicans, and, by the same token, no allopaths and no homœopaths. We practise *medicine,* doctor. Our first duty is to heal the sick. The so-called schools of medicine are for pedants, not for physicians."

The speech was rather a fine one, Caspar thought. He had heard it, once on a time, in the billiard-room of a club, and it was fortunate that he remembered it. He sank back in his chair and sighed complacently, as he noted that the rural medico was impressed.

"M-m—I guess that's about right," admitted Bemis. "An' that's what us eclectics have been a drivin' at for years. We use a little o' the best of everything. We ain't bound up with any old cut-an'-dried notions. Do you use the alkaloids much, doctor?"

"Ah, the alkaloids!" exclaimed Lessing, with sinking heart, but with affected enthusiasm. "I may say, doctor, that I have found them almost invaluable. Are you—that is, do you have time to be interested in agriculture, doctor?

"Farming, my friend—that's what we're keen about where I come from. When I look over your beautiful, fertile country about here, I am filled with the ardor of the agriculturist. Medicine is my profession, sir, but I love the soil and the forces of nature."

Dr. Bemis looked politely bored, but admitted that there were some prime farms in the county, and followed the admission quickly with a query as to Lessing's opinion on the use of antitoxin.

Lessing warmly advocated its use, and hastened to inquire into the visitor's taste in cigars. The latter was hardly a connoisseur, according to the ideas he voiced, and Lessing pressed upon him some of the rather dry perfectos he had unearthed in Dr. Whitcomb's den.

In a happy moment Lessing hit upon the topic of politics, and gradually drew his guest from a half-hearted discussion of national issues to a spirited disquisition on the local problems and abuses.

Thus an hour and a half of the afternoon were used up, and, to the infinite joy of Lessing, Dr. Bemis suddenly discovered that he might be late in getting back to his home for the afternoon office hours, and departed with no more than a perfunctory promise to call again.

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

IT was evening, and Lessing sat comfortably in the library under the reading-lamp, industriously conning a medical journal with the crafty object of picking up a smattering of medical terms and technicalities for use in emergencies.

Verily, Caspar Lessing was leading the quiet life. He was, of all things, a wanderer and adventurer, but this calm, luxurious state was a delightful change from the recent hardships of Broadway and the lodging-house life. For a season—long or short as it might be—he was happily content with three excellent meals a day, a magnificent residence, and the books, pictures, and beauties of the great house.

Tilly, the maid, had finished the day's work and gone home, and he was alone.

A firm step sounded on the veranda, and Lessing leaped out of his chair with a gasp of vague alarm.

A sharp knock sounded from the bronze knocker on the door, and he squared his jaw and went out to open the door.

A young man stood on the veranda—a good-looking young man in well-cut clothes, and with the air of a gentleman.

"Good evening," said Caspar easily, though he was filled with anxiety. The man might be anything from a seeker after medical aid to a detective.

"How are you?" returned the stranger. "My name's Taylor—John A. Taylor. I live here—just over the hill—part of the year. I'm a friend of the Whitcombs, and I learned from the old postmaster to-night that you were also a friend of theirs. Thought I'd look in on you and see if I could do anything for you."

"Come in, come in, Mr. Taylor!" cried Lessing with great relief. "It's no end good of you to be so thoughtful. Naturally I'm a bit lonely here alone, and, as a matter of fact, I didn't know I had any neighbors, of the proper sort, you know. I thought most of the houses were closed up for the winter."

"They are," said Taylor. "I'm up here now, I dare say, for the same reason that you are—a little shooting and a lot of rest. I'm a bit off my feed and down in the

dismal dumps. So it's 'back to nature.' But I never met you in New York, at the Whitcombs', did I, Dr. Lessing? I believe that's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, Lessing—that's right," said Caspar. "No, I never had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Taylor. I'll tell you how it is. I have not the honor of the friendship of the Whitcomb family. Dr. Whitcomb is the only member of the family that I know.

"I'm a physician, you know—a brother-in-arms of his; but I come from way out in Portland, Oregon. I just ran across Whitcomb as he was about sailing for the other side, and, well, here I am up here for a little real rest and enjoyment. While I cannot enjoy the distinction of being a friend of the whole family, Mr. Taylor, I hope I may look upon you as a friend and neighbor."

They walked through the hall and into the library. Lessing lighted the already prepared wood in the fireplace and moved some chairs close to the fender with an air of proprietorship.

"Then you don't know Stella Whitcomb?" said Mr. John Taylor, with a superior lift of the eyebrows.

Lessing shook his head regretfully.

"I can only say that I have heard the doctor speak of her," he said.

"You've missed something!" asserted the young man with youthful conviction.

"Of that I have no doubt," said Lessing. And he almost chuckled as he thought to himself: "This, then, is the 'whipper-snapper' of whom the excellent doctor spoke—the real cause of the family's sudden trip to Europe."

"How long are you going to stay round here?" inquired Taylor.

Caspar sighed and regarded the blazing logs in the fireplace.

"I can hardly say," he said, and sighed again as he thought of the grim truth of the statement. "Whitcomb told me to regard the place as my own until he returned from abroad. But I'm a busy man, Mr. Taylor, and my plans are always indefinite, you know. Perhaps I'll be far from here by next week, and then I may stay here until the place is well tired of me."

"Did Dr. Whitcomb tell you much about the place round here?" asked the young man somewhat curiously. "Did he say anything about me, for instance?"

Lessing smoked and reflected slowly.

"No, I don't remember that he mentioned your name, Mr. Taylor. I should certainly remember, if he had spoken of any particular neighbor or friend, you know. We were together the briefest possible time. A mere handshake, a bite of luncheon together, the hearty invitation to me to come up here, and he was off, you see. I wanted to see more of him—he's a bully old chap, you know."

"Oh, a very fine man," agreed Taylor, in a hesitating manner. "Stella's father couldn't very well be anything else. You'd say so, if you could see her."

Caspar was suddenly disposed to a turn of mischief.

"Speaking of Miss Stella, I do remember something that was said now," he murmured casually. "It almost slipped my mind, but I remember that it was rather funny. You, being a friend of the family, would doubtless appreciate it; you would know the person he told me of. He spoke, I think, of the heavy responsibilities of a parent.

"Doubtless we were speaking, at the time, of my bachelorhood. Anyway, Whitcomb spun me some little yarn about the anxieties he was forced to endure on account of his charming daughter. He practically said that he was taking her to Europe for the winter to get her out of the way of a troublesome young whipper-snapper—the very word he used—who was filling the girl's young head with wild notions of romance and that sort of thing."

Mr. John Taylor went suddenly very red, as though the heat from the crackling logs had ruddied his cheeks.

"The beastly old ass!" he blurted vindictively.

"My dear Mr. Taylor! May I ask of whom you are speaking?" cried Lessing in mock consternation.

"By gad, yes, you may," said the young man. "I'm speaking of old man Whitcomb—the old skinflint! How a girl like Stella ever drew such a lemon for a father, I'm blest if I know. It was a misdeal, all right. By Jove, there are worse things in the world than whipper-snappers!"

"My dear sir, you forget that I am a friend of Dr. Whitcomb," blustered Lessing, in huge enjoyment of the situation. "I am here, sir, as the doctor's guest, and you are here for the moment as my guest. The situation becomes involved, sir, when you give way to such outbursts!"

"I suppose I must beg your pardon," said Taylor. "But if you knew all about the case, you wouldn't blame me, Dr. Lessing. My family is just as good, and a blamed sight better, I guess, than all the Whitcombs, except Stella. But unfortunately we have not quite as much hard cash as the doctor.

"We can't charge poor city suckers a thousand dollars for doping out an earache, you know, because we're none of us high-brow physicians. The doctor has got a swelled head, and he thinks Stella ought to be in line for a duke or something like that. Stella is a wise one, and she's perfectly satisfied with me, and that's where the shoe pinches his nibs, the doctor. That's why I'm a whipper-snapper, Dr. Lessing!"

Lessing smiled patiently.

"The course of true love—*et cetera*, you know, Mr. Taylor," he said dryly.

"Rot!" said the young man.

"Very well, let it go at that," said Lessing. "I believe a lover can see no wisdom in any one but the object of his affections. But don't misjudge me, Mr. Taylor. You have a great deal of my sympathy. You may grant that I am not yet entirely past youth myself."

John Taylor was immediately mollified.

"I didn't mean to be offensive," he said apologetically. "I get rather hot when I think about such things. But I'm not worried about Stella. She's not an ordinary girl. They can drag her all round Europe and Asia and Africa, and back again, and she won't get gay with any dago dukes and things. She'll come back to me just as she went away."

"That is as it should be, I'm sure," said Lessing.

A shout suddenly came to them through the closed windows, from the direction of the road. A shout and the faint sound of running feet.

"What's up?" cried Lessing nervously.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EMERGENCY CALL.

TAYLOR rushed excitedly to the door and threw it open.

"It's old Joel," he shouted. "What's the matter, Joel?"

The postmaster stumbled breathlessly up the steps and staggered into the hall.

"Where's the doc?" he gasped.

"Here I am. What's wrong?" cried Lessing, hurrying forward, vague misgivings tugging at his heart.

"C'm over—t' th' store—quick!" panted Joel Tubbs. "I—I've cut a man, doc! Crazy drunk—I guess he is. I—I was closin' up. In he come—a big Swede—an' made fer the money-drawer. I got holt of 'im, an'—an' he belted me one—over th' head. Then I—I got holt o' the cheese-knife an'—an' cut 'im. I guess he's bleedin' t' death. Come along! I don't wanter be no murderer!"

Caspar was plainly "up against it." Not only was there a life to save, according to the excited account of the postmaster, but his own safety and comfort were at stake. He had idiotically assumed the difficult rôle of a physician, and now Fate herself seemed intent upon trying him out to the very letter of the absurd contract.

"Come on, Dr. Lessing, we'd better see what's going on down there," said Taylor, observing that Lessing hesitated.

So Lessing took the bit in his teeth, and ran out of the house bareheaded, stupidly forgetting the first habitual precaution of a physician—to take his medicine and instrument case.

When the trio arrived at the store, the drunken ruffian was in sole possession. Under the dim oil-lamps he was laying about him to wreck everything in sight, and he was bleeding profusely from a wound in the forearm.

The eyes of his two companions were on Lessing—Joel's anxious and trustful, and Taylor's vaguely suspicious, or so Lessing fancied them.

Hesitancy was out of the question as matters stood. The bogus doctor entered the store ahead of his companions and approached the marauder.

"Steady, there, my man!" he said, with an attempt at firmness. "You're hurt. You will bleed to death if you don't stop this business. Let me see."

The Swedish farm-hand, a savage for the time from the effects of liquor, answered him with a swinging blow of a stout club.

Lessing dodged nimbly to one side and avoided the blow by an inch. It was now too late to run away. There was nothing left for him but a fight.

As the club was raised to deliver another blow he grappled with the big fellow, and they both fell and rolled upon the floor, the

Swede making the air sulfurous with a torrent of strange, wild oaths.

Tubbs and Taylor came near, but it was a difficult matter to get a hold on the struggling men, and they seemed reluctant to play the observers' game and await results.

First Lessing got a marked advantage, and then the frenzied Swede broke his hold and tried to crush him by brute force. The wounded arm poured forth blood and made Lessing a gory sight.

They scrubbed the floor bare of sawdust, overturned cracker-boxes and a stand of garden seeds, and promised to wreck what the Swede had previously neglected.

Lessing's collar was torn from his neck, and his clothes were torn and stripped in places, but, with all his habitual lassitude, he had plenty of fight in him when roused, and he was fiercely intent upon whipping the huge and unwieldy ruffian.

"Get 'im by the neck an' choke th' life outer 'im, doc!" yelled Joel.

And Taylor leaned forward over the combatants and coached his favorite of the match with the manner of a football captain.

The air was filled with groans, imprecations, and the clatter of boot-heels.

Lessing was fast giving out under the heart-breaking strength of the crazed man, but he fought on and on, trying madly for some miraculous advantage.

The blood-letting wound doubtless saved the day for the smaller man. The desperate giant weakened steadily, and his intoxication also hampered his heart-action and breathing.

In a moment of yielding weakness on the part of the Swede, Lessing struggled free from his embrace and caught him by the throat. The next minute the man lay inert beneath him.

So much was accomplished. Now Lessing was called upon to display some of his vaunted skill.

He racked his brain for memories of "first aid to the injured," and called upon his native common sense.

The two observers were watching him keenly, and he realized that action was the important thing. A towel lay upon the counter, and he seized it; also a piece of a splintered barrel-stave. He had never rigged a tourniquet in his life, but some instinct told him how it should be managed.

He knelt by the unconscious man, and knotted the towel about his arm, above the gaping wound, from which the sleeve had been stripped away in the scrimmage. Then he slipped the piece of wood under the knot, and began rapidly to twist it, thus drawing the band tighter and tighter about the arm.

The blood stream was reduced to a mere trickle, and presently ceased altogether.

"Now one of you must mind this," he said, "while I run back to the house and get some things. Very stupid of me to come away without them, but the alarm was so sudden and unexpected."

He had not the ghost of an idea what things he could get, or what things were required, but he had rallied his nerve and he was prepared to play out the game, true to the character of Caspar Lessing, gentleman adventurer.

CHAPTER V.

A DEMONSTRATION OF SKILL.

DOCTORS habitually take their time. Lessing had noted that fact in times past. And great doctors take their time even more freely than others. Therefore he went to the house and prepared for what promised to be an ordeal with the slow deliberation of an adept.

In the library he had noticed a book on minor surgery, with odd plates showing the methods of applying bandages, dressing wounds, setting fractures, and the like. He pounced upon the book now and ran over its pages frantically. Soon he found pictures of queer, curved needles and thread in various stages of the process of closing together the edges of wounds. He read the text feverishly, and learned probably as much as many a medical student learns in a night's study of the book.

In a black satchel he found bright, curved needles like those in the pictures, and a quantity of silk thread.

He had been away from the store some twenty minutes when he reappeared there with the important-looking bag.

He spread out his things, and steeled his nerves like an accomplished actor to go through the threading of the needle and the cleansing of the wound with antiseptic fluid, according to directions.

Luckily the man was still unconscious, and did not struggle when he plunged the point of the needle into the flesh. He had, in times past, sewn buttons on his clothes, but this was his first experience at stitching the human tissue.

With an eye to the gallery, he wielded the needle as rapidly and confidently as he could manage, and in a surprisingly short time the fissure was closed. It was not the job of a seamstress, and the victim probably carried a peculiar scar with him to the grave, but when a bandage was applied and the tourniquet was removed, there was little more bleeding.

"Now," said Lessing professionally, "I think he'll be all right in a little while. Such animals don't die easily. He's got to sober up, and then he'll recover from his weakness and loss of blood rapidly. If you'll just spread a blanket down in your back room, Mr. Tubbs, we'll fix him up there for the rest of the night, and I'll stay by him to see that nothing goes wrong."

"You're all right, doc," declared Tubbs. "By heck, I b'lieve Doc Whitcomb couldn't 'a' done a han'somer job."

Lessing smiled, and waved his hand deprecatingly. Taylor seemed to look doubtful.

The man was made comfortable in the back room, and soon regained consciousness to the extent of a restive semistupor.

Taylor uttered a few courteous commonplaces and departed to his home. Joel Tubbs sat down in a chair by the stove and went to sleep.

Lessing was too excited to be troubled with sleep, and he sat down by the side of his patient and kept lonely vigil.

From time to time he examined the man, noting his respiration and heart action with professional interest, though there was no longer a gallery to play to.

It was new business to Caspar, and he gave himself up to serious reflections. Perhaps he had saved a life and spared good Joel Tubbs the brand of Cain.

At some personal risk he had fought with a superior adversary and overcame him—fought with all the courage of a hero, and to save the life of his opponent. Surely, he mused, the deed was not a paltry one.

In his life of idleness and selfish egoism he must now, and forever after, be credited with one worthy act.

CHAPTER VI.

STORMS.

IT had been an early autumn. The leaves turned ruddy and golden before the last summer flowers were quite past, and now the trees were gaunt and bare before their time. Carrying out the effect of premature winter, there came untimely snow flurries, and presently a snow-storm approaching the dignity of a blizzard.

The wind came with the snow in March-like violence, and Caspar Lessing found himself unexpectedly winter-bound in the snug haven of the Whitcomb house.

The New York mail was delayed for a few hours in the storm, and Caspar read the newspapers when they were a day old.

One news item struck him with particular force, as he sat and read comfortably before the open fire. The steamship Colossus had not made Southampton, nor had she been heard from since leaving American shores.

The storm was reported as furiously heavy at sea, and grave fears were already entertained for the safety of the great liner. It was evident, anyway, that her wireless apparatus had failed, for all efforts to get in communication with her were in vain.

Young Mr. Taylor dropped in for an informal call in a nervous flurry of excitement.

He was ordinarily a fairly self-possessed fellow, but he wrung his hands and gave vent to dire predictions, as he talked of the disquieting report of the missing ship.

Lessing assured him that the present-day chances of shipwreck and loss were reduced to a comfortable minimum. The gravest probabilities were that something had gone wrong with the ship's machinery, or that she was wandering off her course in the fierce gale.

Privately, in his innermost consciousness, Caspar was entertaining unworthy thoughts of the interesting possibilities touching his personal affairs, in case the Colossus should —well, in case she should not come again to port.

He hoped, with human decency, that no grave danger menaced the Whitcomb family, but his wandering thoughts played dangerously about the possible contingencies of the Whitcombs' failure to return to the family estate.

Naturally there would be heirs at law, and all that sort of thing. There would be plenty of people to claim ownership of the house and estate, but the usual processes of law would be involved, and Caspar saw himself, as "a friend of the family," holding possession of the place for an indefinite period.

The two men sat and smoked by the fire, and talked of tempests and destruction until

the subject was exhausted. Lessing was characteristically optimistic and cheerful, and Taylor was proportionately doleful and apprehensive.

Luncheon was served, and after that the visitor stayed on, and went from neighborly friendliness to idle inquisitiveness. He became morbidly personal, and asked embarrassing leading questions touching upon the past and present of his host's life.

It was wearying and irksome, but Lessing was equal to all occasions, and in the course of the conversation he spun a yarn of adventures by land and sea, and in the medical profession, that made the palpably incredulous young man yield at times to naive wonderment, and caused Lessing himself to pause once or twice in inward admiration of his own powers as an artist in fiction.

"By the way," said Taylor during the course of a medical story, "I forgot to tell you that my old man is liable to drop in on you most any time—to-day, perhaps. He's up here for a few days at our place, and he's plumb nutty on the subject of doctors. He keeps old Whitcomb busy most of the time, and whenever he hears of a new doctor of any distinction he just has to try him out."

"M-m," murmured Lessing politely, concealing his feeling of uneasiness. "I'd be very glad to meet your father, but, you know, I have no right to practise medicine in this State. There are medical laws to be respected, you know. Now, I'd be very glad to give your father a consultation in Oregon, but New York is a different matter."

Taylor eyed him keenly.

"You didn't seem to mind prescribing for Joel Tubbs's rheumatism," he said suggestively, "and you tackled that drunken Swede without any fuss about the law."

"Those are different matters," said Lessing patiently. "I merely helped Joel out in a friendly spirit. No consideration in the way of money passed between us. And in regard to the drunken man, I had no choice in the matter. It is a physician's first duty to aid the injured and suffering, you know. The laws beneficently keep away from such matters."

Presently Taylor became tired of talking, and went away. Lessing began immediately to prepare for the threatened visit of the senior Taylor.

In his peregrinations about the house he had come upon a large note-book, and a cursory examination of it showed him elaborate records, kept by Whitcomb, of numerous patients, the nature of their maladies, and the treatment the doctor had used in each case.

With a happy thought, Caspar unearthed the book again and pored over it carefully. Sure enough, he found the name of Anson Taylor, and the attached data informed him that Anson Taylor was afflicted with chronic dyspepsia, and that he had thrived for a time upon a diet of fruit and cereals, and mended rapidly in a general way upon the prescription recorded at foot of the page.

He learned the notes carefully, committing to memory the symptoms and indications of the old gentleman's malady. Then he copied the prescription, signed his name to it, and placed it in a drawer of the desk, against the possible coming of the patient.

The day wore on, the snow-storm continued fitfully, and toward evening an elderly, gray-haired man came to the house in a handsome sleigh, the horses of which the coachman had to force through the rising drifts.

Mr. Judson Taylor was announced, and Caspar Lessing received him with dignity in the reception-room.

"I've been hearing about you since I came up from town, an' I decided to run over an' see what you c'd do for me. I'm a sick man, Dr. Lessing," said the caller, with a note of deep self-pity in his voice.

"I'm very glad to meet you," said Caspar, "but you are no doubt sufficiently familiar with the laws to know that I have no right to practise medicine here. I'm from the West, you know."

"West be blowed!" grumbled the old man. "What do I care where you came from?"

"It amounts to a matter of taking some risk," said Caspar, with the air of a man given to being very careful of his reputation and personal safety—"but I cannot conscientiously refuse whatever aid I can give to any one that is suffering."

"That's the idea precisely," said the patient. "I am suffering th' tortures o' purgatory!"

Without more ado he began to relate his woes, and Lessing gave ear with affected interest and sympathy.

"Come into the office, Mr. Taylor," he said, "and we'll see what may be done."

So they went in and sat among the books and instruments and pill-bottles, and the patient took new courage and plunged into a wealth of detail.

Lessing sat back in the tilting chair, and recalled the items he had learned from Whitcomb's note-book.

"I wonder," he said sententiously, "if you are not rather susceptible to the effects of strong acids?"

"You've hit it!" cried Taylor, with satisfaction. "I can't eat 'em; no fruit or vinegar or anything like that."

Lessing put himself to the trouble of examining the patient's heart with a stethoscope; and he looked intently into his eyes, at his tongue, and counted his pulse. His professional air was admirable.

"I venture to say you are a coffee-drinker," he said, with the conviction of having read it in the note-book. "I should say you used it to excess."

"You read me like a book, doctor," said the patient, with vast satisfaction.

Lessing pondered long, scanning the man's face, and wrinkling his brows thoughtfully.

"I want you to cut out coffee," he said at last, "and try to content yourself with plain milk for a while. As to your food, I want you to eat whatever you like, with as much care and moderation as possible. And I will give you a prescription which I believe will do the rest of the trick."

He scribbled busily on a prescription-blank for a moment; then took the copied prescription from the drawer under cover of some blotting-paper and palmed it into the place of the one just scribbled.

"I wish you'd have that compounded as soon as possible," he said.

Taylor took the bit of paper reverently.

"How much, doctor?" he asked.

"I said, when you came in, that I could not legally practise in this State," said Lessing. "If we were in Oregon it would be a different matter."

"Oh, bosh!" cried Taylor testily. "I pay for what I get. Now, how much would you charge me if we were in Oregon, doctor?"

"I'll tell you," said Lessing with sudden inspiration; "I occupy a position slightly different from the regular physician. I am a specialist in diagnosis."

"Fine!" cried Taylor with gratification.

"I prefer to treat you as a neighbor and friend, Mr. Taylor," Lessing continued. "Anything I can do to relieve you will give me great pleasure. Merely to gratify your curiosity, I will tell you that were we sitting in my private consulting-room in Portland, instead of in this pleasant house, I should charge you—er—one hundred dollars for my diagnosis and advice."

"Dr. Lessing," said Taylor feelingly, "one hundred dollars is money—there's no denying it—but it does me good just to talk to a man that knows his business like you do. I'm no grafter. I never have had to fish for something-for-nothing."

He drew out a fat wallet, which made Lessing's eyes sparkle, and counted out five crackling twenty-dollar notes.

"You take this, sir," he said emphatically, "and don't worry about whether this is the State of Oregon or what it is. This business is between us—and I'm satisfied."

Lessing elevated his brows and hands with well simulated horror.

"My dear man, I couldn't think of it!" he said.

"Well, then, by mighty, I couldn't think of taking the prescription," replied Taylor, and made as if to tear it in two.

"Be reasonable, my dear sir," pleaded Lessing, playing with his fish. "Consider—you are here as my guest. I am not here to practise medicine, but to enjoy some leisure and the quiet comforts of your town. Please regard this as merely a friendly service."

Taylor tossed the five notes upon the table.

"Take it or leave it. There it lays," he said decisively. "I intend to take this prescription away with me, but I do not intend to take the money with it."

Lessing continued to protest and expostulate until the old man got up, made courteous and grateful adieus, and left the house.

Then the adventurer walked back to the desk, took up the money, and stuffed it into a waistcoat pocket, fingering it caressingly. It was more money than he had seen before in months, and he felt that his lines were indeed cast in pleasant places.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE NIGHT.

DARKNESS fell, and Tilly, the maid, drew the shades, shutting out the storm, and served a dinner which brought fresh joy to the happy soul of "Dr. Lessing"—who had never signed a prescription in his life before that day, and had never seen Portland, Oregon.

A short evening was passed in reading

medical journals, which now began to take on a sort of interest for the dabbler in the great science.

At ten o'clock he went up-stairs, donned a pair of exquisite blue silk pajamas bearing the Whitcomb monogram upon the pocket-flap, switched off the lights of the great house, and crept between the soft covers of a handsome, four-poster bed.

He was doubtful as to the time, but it was well into the middle of the night when he was awakened by some unfamiliar noise.

He sat up in the bed and listened. The storm still roared about the house, but everything else seemed still and peaceful.

Then, as he grew wider awake, he heard an unmistakable footfall down-stairs.

With a leap he was out of bed, but he stepped softly, and forebore to turn on the lights.

His first thought was of betrayal, and discovery by some unknown member of the Whitcomb family. But, on hasty reflection, it seemed unlikely that any one would come through the raging storm to investigate his presence in the house at that time of night.

In a drawer of the dresser was a loaded revolver, and he felt his way to it in the darkness, and possessed himself of it.

Then he tiptoed cautiously out of the room and to the top of the stairs.

Below, on the heavy pile of the rich carpets, some one was walking about almost noiselessly.

A burglar! thought Caspar with conviction. But what of it? Why should he be disturbed? His precious hundred dollars was safe in his waistcoat pocket in the bedroom, and there was nothing else in the house for him to lose.

There was a switch, governing the lights, at the head of the stairs, and he stood with his left hand resting upon it, while his right held the revolver, ready for action if required.

Caspar shivered uncomfortably in the now chilly hall, and he was thinking ruefully of the warm bed, when the mysterious footfalls sounded louder and came into the hall directly below him.

For a moment he hoped the person would depart from the house by the front door, but the question was quickly settled. He could see nothing in the darkness, but a foot was placed on the lowest step of the staircase, and there was Caspar standing on the highest step, directly in the way.

His fingers tightened on the switch, and in a flash the lights were on and two men stared at each other in amazement.

The intruder was visibly astonished—too astonished to do anything but gape, open-mouthed, at the pajama-clad figure and the pointing, threatening revolver.

As for Caspar Lessing, he was not a whit less amazed. For the man at the bottom of the stairs was the blond man that had sat at dinner with Dr. Whitcomb in the New York restaurant—the man that had dropped the scrap of paper which had been Lessing's *open sesame* to this erstwhile calm haven of refuge and comfort.

His pretty little game was nipped in the bud, it seemed to Caspar.

"Well, what do you want here?" he demanded huskily.

The man was nonplused, but he seemed calm and unruffled.

"It may be," he said, "that explanations and apologies are in order. Strange as it all may seem, I am not a burglar."

"Oh, very well," said Caspar flippantly. "Suppose you turn on the explanations at once, then. They ought to be interesting."

"I am here at Dr. Whitcomb's invitation," said the man. "I left New York by an afternoon train, expecting to get here in the early evening. The storm delayed us badly, and I arrived in this forlorn old town just after midnight, knowing no one, and without the ghost of an idea how to get into this house."

"But it's a simple matter, is it not?" said Lessing dryly. "If you have not the key of the house you wish to enter, and do not know the owner, why, break in—and the matter is settled."

"I don't know who you are, or why you are here," retorted the stranger with some heat, "but you are pretty careless in your speech. I tell you I am a friend of Dr. Whitcomb, and I am here at his house by special invitation. My name is Guthrie—Charles W. Guthrie—and if you know the Whitcomb family well enough to be here in their house, you must know who I am."

Lessing was disturbed. He knew that by a slip of the tongue, an instant's unwariness, he would be in the toils.

He lowered the revolver and went part way down the stairs.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Guthrie," he said cordially. "You speak convincingly, and I am disposed to take your word, despite the undeniably suspicious circum-

stances. I well remember hearing Whitcomb speak of his friend Guthrie.

"By Jove, you're the man he lunched with the day before he sailed! I was with him that afternoon, later, and he spoke of you. But he said nothing about your coming up here. I understood that I was the only privileged person, with regard to the use of the place."

He made the speech at a venture, hoping the details would tally with the actual facts, as possessed by Mr. Guthrie.

The latter eyed him suspiciously and took a tack in another direction.

"I don't know who you are," he said almost sneeringly, "but I have an idea what you are. But you are right in placing me as the man who lunched with Whitcomb. And I'll tell you further, that I'm the man who received and carelessly lost the letter that Whitcomb gave me to present to the village postmaster here—the letter that I more than half suspect you used to gain entrance to this place."

"That's enough!" cried Lessing with asperity. "You go too far, sir. I am Dr. Caspar Lessing, of Portland, Oregon—a colleague of Whitcomb's, and his guest here.

"As I was first on the ground, and know nothing of these queer claims of yours, I shall only allow you shelter here for the present, until I can look into the matter. But you, sir, will have a deal of apologizing to do before we are through. You have passed the bounds of common decency."

Guthrie was apparently in no mood to be impressed by bluster. He gazed at Lessing skeptically, and a smile of amusement made his face a bit more sinister.

"Isn't it rather irregular for a guest to make free with his host's haberdashery and personal property?" he asked pointedly. "I see Whitcomb's monogram upon your pajamas. I suppose his invitation was so sweeping that it included a use of his personal effects?"

"I might go into a detailed account of my private affairs for your enlightenment," returned Lessing, "but I don't think I shall. My principal inclination, Mr. Guthrie, is to chuck you out into one of those snow-banks. That's the logical treatment for a churl like you, friend of Whitcomb or not!"

"Oh, I say, spare us the dramatics!" sneered Guthrie. "You're a pretty good actor, Mr.—— I don't know what your real name is, nor care—but I'm blamed if I like your face.

"I'm going to rummage round here for something to eat, and when it's morning I shall start out to see the postmaster and a few others in regard to your questionable occupation of my friend's house. I'd stake almost anything that you're little better than a hobo. Breaking, entering, and living in a country house, closed for the winter, is a time-honored trick of the rascals of your ilk.

"I say, do you happen to know the Taylors?"

Lessing was crimson with genuine anger, but he held himself with dignity still.

"I do know Mr. Anson Taylor and his son," he answered coldly. "Mr. Taylor was here this very afternoon to consult me professionally. John Taylor drops in every day for a chat."

"Don't bank too much on knowing the Taylors," sneered the other man. "They're not so hard to get acquainted with, you know. Personally, I don't care for the Taylor crowd. No more does Whitcomb. But for all that, I shall drop in on them and find out what they know about you."

"Pray do anything you jolly well please, Mr. Guthrie," said Lessing. "I am not interested in your movements, so long as they will take you away from me for a while. I am going to bed again to get some of the sleep your ill-timed visit interrupted.

"I will pay you the compliment to believe what you say in regard to your being a friend of Whitcomb, and you may enjoy the freedom of his house without fear of molestation by me. I must say, however, that Whitcomb has a deucedly queer taste in his choice of acquaintances."

"Yes, so you would make it appear," replied Guthrie, and he laughed with relish at his easily turned joke, and walked jauntily through the hall to the dining-room.

Lessing, true to his word, went back to bed, but he did not sleep.

His old reliable diplomacy and *finesse* had failed him miserably.

The game was as good as up, and there was nothing left for him now but a discreet getaway before it should be too late.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MORNING OF ACTION.

THE dawn came. The snowstorm had abated, and the sun gave promise of coming out.

At a little after seven o'clock, Lessing

heard his inquisitor go out and slam the front door. He went to the window and saw him wade through the drifts to the road and start out in the direction of the post-office.

Caspar reflected with glee that he had not relinquished Whitcomb's letter to the postmaster. That, at least, could not be introduced as evidence.

Suddenly a happy thought struck him. The letter was still in his pocket. In certain precarious little affairs of fortune in the past he had shown some skill at the delicate art of imitating the handwriting of others. Of all times, the present was the one that called for recourse in his varied accomplishments.

On the hazard that Guthrie would take time to round up not only Joel Tubbs, but the Taylor family, he hastened down-stairs and to the desk in the office.

For a few moments he practised writing upon a scrap of paper in a rough imitation of the flourishing hand of Dr. Whitcomb as displayed in the original restaurant letter.

Then he went to the bottom of the desk-drawer and found an old sheet of note-paper, different from the stationery in the desk. There were a few other sheets of it, and he shrewdly destroyed them in the fireplace.

He wished the letter he was about to write to appear as a casual note, written in the city just before the departure of the Whitcombs. He wrote, in an imitation of the Whitcomb writing that would have puzzled a bank expert:

DEAR OLD LESSING:

I dare say you have heard that I'm off suddenly with the family for Europe to-morrow. I still hope to see you before I go—to-day if I can—but in case I miss you, I want to beg you to use that old ranch of mine up at Ardmuir any time or all the time while you remain here in the East. If I don't see you, I'll send you a note to my caretaker, Joel Tubbs, at Ardmuir, instructing him to open the house for you.

Ever yours,

HENRY WHITCOMB.

It was a clever job, and he surveyed it with smiling satisfaction. He destroyed the original restaurant note as a precaution—he might be searched—and placed the forgery in his wallet.

He had no intention of using it except in defense of a last stand. He could conceive several unpleasant situations in which the production of the fake letter as an apparent afterthought would come as a positive clincher. But the idea of remaining in the house and standing his ground was abandoned. He felt that he would be lucky indeed to get back to Broadway without trouble of some serious and unpleasant nature.

The letter done, he rang up the railroad station on the telephone, and inquired if the trains were running to New York on schedule time.

The station-agent informed him that the storm had played fast and loose with the line, but the express which should have passed through at half past seven was due in about thirty minutes, if it lost no more time on the way.

Caspar lost no time in preparing for departure. He threw his handful of belongings into his old suit-case, conscientiously avoiding some of the attractive articles which lay invitingly about him.

He wrapped himself in his thin topcoat and went cautiously onto the veranda to survey the surrounding country.

A farmer's ox-cart was dragging laboriously along the road, but nowhere upon the white landscape could he discover a sign of the troublesome Guthrie.

The time was ripe for departure, and Lessing departed without ceremony, making his way with difficulty through the deep snow at a pace which landed him at the railroad station puffing and blowing from the exertion.

The train might be along, the agent thought, in five or ten minutes, and the anxious traveler paced up and down nervously with a wary eye on the road.

A covered sleigh—one of the few public conveyances of the village—approached and drew up at the station. Lessing watched for the passenger to get out with bated breath. He felt painfully confident that it would be his vindictive pursuer. But it proved to be only a countryman on a journey to the city.

Then another sleigh hove in sight, coming from the direction of the Whitcomb house, and Lessing clearly saw the fellow Guthrie sitting in it and urging the driver to put his horse to its best speed.

Not a second to lose! Not a second for deliberation!

He ran to the driver of the sleigh which had brought the farmer. "Have you a good horse there?" he asked sharply.

"Wal, I guess he's as good as they'll run," said the driver.

"Run me over to Brimton, and beat that sleigh that's coming, and I'll give you a ten-spot!" he cried, and clambered into the sleigh without waiting for the yokel's answer.

But the yokel had an eye for gain when it was expressed in ten-spots, and with a glance over his shoulder at the coming sleigh, he whipped up his horse and was off at a good trot without asking his fare as to the whys and wherefores.

Lessing sat tight, and paid no attention to the fact that Guthrie, in the sleigh behind, was shouting something at him in tones of violence and menace.

The horse was better than he had dared hope; and as the runners glided and dug through the partially broken-out roads, the distance of a dozen yards between the vehicles increased to twenty or more.

Both drivers plied the whip with energy, and the poor horses floundered and exerted themselves until the white lather rolled in billows over their flanks.

They covered the two miles between the towns in thirty minutes, but the New York express got to the Brimton station first.

"I've got to get that train!" said Lessing, as they saw it stop and stand still at the station.

He waved a twenty-dollar note in the driver's face, and the latter lashed his jaded horse into a run. The pursuing sleigh was a good hundred yards behind.

The bell on the locomotive clanged and the wheels of the cars began to revolve. The driver yelled and belabored the horse lustily. They drew alongside the station platform as the last car was moving away with increasing swiftness.

"You've done your best!" gasped Lessing, and he magnanimously thrust the precious bank-note into the yokel's hand as he sprang out and sprinted along the slippery planks.

For thirty yards he ran as he had never run before, and then he reached out a hand and grasped the flying hand-rail of the last fleeting car.

A wild jump—and he almost caught the step. But ice had coated the step and rendered it an insecure foothold. His foot slipped, he was dragged downward, and then his grip on the rail broke, and he rolled over and over in the snow beside the rails like a dummy man. And the New York express sped on its way without the extra passenger.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESERVE CARD.

IT was the friendly yokel that dug Caspar out of the snowbank and helped him to his feet. But it was Guthrie and young John Taylor that dashed across the station platform and pounced upon the luckless fugitive.

"We've got you!" cried Guthrie with zest.

"Yes, we've got you, you four-flusher!" seconded Taylor.

Lessing quickly mastered his desperate confusion and managed to smile sarcastically at his enemies.

"I am flattered by all this attention, gentlemen," he said coolly. "I can scarcely understand your satisfaction in having 'got me,' as you put it. I don't know why a man starting on a journey, who has done nothing reprehensible, or has no design of an illegal nature, should be molested in this Wild-West fashion. It seems to me if there is an offended party, I am that one."

"Talk! Talk! Talk! You're an artist at it," snarled Guthrie.

"It was a mighty slick way you buncoed us into thinking you were the real goods, come to live among us," growled young Taylor.

"Well, now suppose we get out of this cold blast and go back to the house, as long as I've missed my train," suggested Lessing pleasantly. "I have a few more things to say to you gentlemen. We'll get Joel Tubbs and have a little talk along the lines you have become so strenuously interested in."

"Some more of the con game," said Guthrie. "But all right. We'll go back to the house. It suits me well enough. I want to get a constable, and have this business settled and out of my hands. And we don't know yet what you've done to the house and Whitcomb's clothes and things. As for Joel Tubbs, he's an old numskull."

"That," commented Lessing, "is doubtless because he did not agree with you this morning in your estimate of me. Joel Tubbs is not a person of refinement, but he has more horse sense than any one I have yet encountered about here."

They commandeered the sleigh in which the two man-hunters had arrived, and the

three of them piled in and were driven back to Ardmuir, and to the eventful house of Dr. Whitcomb.

Joel Tubbs greeted them from the veranda. He had listened incredulously to the tales of Guthrie, and he was now guarding the house in much wonderment and perturbation of spirit.

"We got him just as he was getting away, Tubbs," said Guthrie.

"I understand this absurd business just about as much as you do, I guess, Joel," said Lessing. "Our friend Mr. Whitcomb has some very odd friends, apparently, who find diversion in going about upsetting the peace and comfort of his other friends.

"I don't mind telling you that I started for the city this morning to get one or two friends of mine to come up here and set the mind of this man at rest with regard to my identity and standing. Being a sort of amateur sleuth-hound, he refused to part with my company, and restrained me with the methods of a Russian cossack."

Joel shook his head and gazed at the trio in amazement.

"And you were going to bring back some friends, were you?" sniffed Guthrie. "Another cock-and-bull yarn. Heaven help the village if you had brought back any of your friends!

"And now, Tubbs, I want to get a line on the constable and have this fellow locked up."

"Wait a minute," said Lessing, with a slow smile spreading over his face. "It would add a touch to the comedy to have the constable here, I admit; but it all takes time, and I am tired of the whole affair already. I have a little bit of interesting evidence here which I might have shown you before had I considered you entitled to it. I'll let Joel read it, for I can't say I put much trust in men of your stamp."

He paused a moment, noting the look of mystification on the faces of his hearers. Then he flourished from his wallet, with a dramatic gesture, the cleverly forged letter he had prepared in the morning.

"Read it aloud, please," he said, handing it to Joel, "and after that you may hold it for the gentlemen to look at."

The old postmaster adjusted his spectacles and squinted at the letter. Presently he read it in a halting, labored way.

"I'll go my bond it's written by Doc Whitcomb!" he said with conviction as he finished the reading.

The two doubters scanned it with critical care. Then they wagged their heads and looked at Lessing with puzzled frowns.

"I can't say I'm satisfied that you're all right," said Guthrie with something like cold politeness, "but if I find that I have been too hasty and in the wrong, I assure you I shall apologize humbly. I suppose I can't prevent you from going or coming as you choose, but I have one or two more lines of investigation before I am through."

"Now, pray go as far as you like," said Lessing.

"Do you intend to stay here?" demanded Guthrie.

"I had some doubts," said Lessing thoughtfully, "but now I believe I shall stay."

CHAPTER X.

THE SHIP THAT CAME IN.

CASPAR LESSING, Guthrie, and young Taylor dined together in the Whitcomb house that evening, but the function was anything but a love-feast.

Guthrie intimated that he was remaining indefinitely to guard the house, as it were, until he could communicate with some one who would settle the social or criminal status of Lessing.

Young Taylor vowed that he would stay and see it out, for Guthrie might need his support if Lessing should suddenly show his hand.

As for Lessing, he smiled his habitually complacent smile, and ironically insisted on doing the honors of the house as host, to the infinite disgust of the other two men.

"Though the blizzards rage, we do not go hungry," said Lessing pleasantly. "Tilly is an ingenious cook, and the larder is stocked for a veritable siege. You'll have some of these waffles, Mr. Guthrie?"

Guthrie scowled at the man's bald temerity, and exchanged a look of disgust with Taylor, as he silently passed his plate. Luckily, his temper had no appreciable effect upon his appetite.

"You know, by Jove! it's good to have company," said Caspar Lessing. "I do believe the loneliness was getting on my nerves. Whitcomb would have been glad to have me bring friends along with me, but it seemed a bit of a nervy thing to do. Now I have the charming society of you two gentlemen—quite unexpectedly."

Taylor, flushed with annoyance, worked busily at his plate. He longed, with the impetuousness of youth, to lay violent hands on this fellow, whom he was satisfied was an out-and-out impostor.

"Oh, what's the use of keeping up a poor joke, *Doctor* Lessing?" said Guthrie vexatiously. "I'm practically convinced that you are nothing but a tramp. You've played your cards mighty well—I'll give you the credit for that, but the final show-down is coming.

"It might be the simplest plan merely to let you make a getaway and take yourself out of our way; but my interest is aroused now, and I'm just going to hold you here if I have to do it by force until I get some one either to identify you or stamp you positively as an impostor. You're caged here, Lessing, and you'll stay close until I say you can go."

Caspar Lessing laughed again.

"Really, gentlemen," he said banteringly, "you do me a great injustice. I grant you I might be improved upon as a host, but, of all things, I certainly would not leave this house with my two guests here like this. You have honored me with your society, gentlemen, and I appreciate it so much that I would never go away and leave you to entertain yourselves if you should remain a year."

"Oh, he's hopeless!" said Guthrie to Taylor. "We shall have to talk by ourselves, Taylor. Let us talk about the Whitcombs."

"By all means. The Whitcombs!" cried Lessing with affected delight.

"A lot you know about them, I guess!" snorted young Taylor.

"You'd best observe the limits of decency, Lessing," said Guthrie warningly. "We've stood for a good deal of your insolent jesting, but you can't enter into our intimate conversation like this, you know."

"I'll enter into anything I jolly well please at what is practically my own table," said Lessing. "I have told you a score of times already, but you don't seem to grasp the fact that I know Whitcomb. Any conversation you may start about him will interest me, I assure you."

"I said we'll talk about the Whitcombs!" replied Guthrie. "I believe you've only claimed an acquaintance with Whitcomb himself."

Lessing knew well that his safest course lay in a discreet silence, but his mettle was touched. The adventure, passing through various stages of discomfort and risk, had taken on the air of a game between him and these men. For the moment it pleased him to be reckless.

"True enough," he agreed, "but an intimate acquaintance with Whitcomb presupposes some knowledge of his family, does it not? I know, for instance, something of the vexing affairs of little Miss Stella and her admirers."

Young Taylor colored slightly.

"Leave the ladies out, if you please," said Guthrie.

"Oh, believe me, the ladies are quite as safe in my hands as in yours," retorted Lessing. "I am showing no disrespect to Miss Stella in merely proving to you that I know something about the family.

"I know, for another instance," he ventured as a chance shot, "that my friend Whitcomb has had the bad taste to suggest you, my dear Guthrie, as an alternative in the annoying case of the lady's inclination toward a fondness for our friend Taylor, here—the 'whipper-snapper.'"

John Taylor's face turned to a shade verging on the purple.

"You lie in your teeth!" he cried. "It's all a fabrication! Your very statement proves that you're extemporizing. Guthrie, here, is old enough to be Stella's father."

Lessing laughed aloud with enjoyment, for the shot had not only hit the youth but rebounded upon Guthrie.

The latter flushed hotly at the remark of the irate young man, forgetting Lessing's banter for the moment.

"Because you're a kid, Taylor," he retorted, "does not prove that I am aged. I dare say I'm some ten years older than Stella Whitcomb, but that's because she's a mere girl—not because I'm far along in years, my boy. And just to show that Lessing isn't extemporizing, as you say, so very far from the mark, I'll tell you that Whitcomb has actually asked me to devote some time to his daughter, to get her mind off young striplings like you."

The laugh of Lessing sounded again across the table, like that of a mischievous Mephisto.

John Taylor laid down his knife and fork and moved his chair back from the table, the better to give room for his increasing rage.

"Rot!" he blurted. "Do you know how much Stella would care for you, Guthrie?

She doesn't care that for you!" And he snapped his fingers with a sharp click.

"She's talked to me, I tell you, about you and all the other choice friends of the old man. You're nothing but a New York 'sport,' anyhow. You're vulgar — you've got more money than breeding—and your reputation is none too good."

"Dear me!" murmured Lessing, with a chuckle.

Guthrie, goaded to the breaking-point, rose and reached over the table to catch young Taylor by the collar as a preliminary to a demonstration of righteous indignation.

Taylor jumped back out of reach. Guthrie quickly followed him around the table. Taylor struck out in self-defense and landed a harmless smack on his cheek.

Instantly the hot-tempered man had the boy by the throat and was choking him.

"Stop that, you brute!" cried Lessing.

He sprang forward and caught Guthrie in a muscular embrace. For an instant the three struggled, and then Lessing broke Guthrie's grip and hurled him against the wall.

"While I am acting as host," he said with emphasis, "my guests will endeavor to play at being gentlemen. There will be no bullying."

Guthrie was furious, but cowed; and John Taylor was deeply hurt and humiliated.

Lessing was the picture of outraged justice, but inwardly he was wildly jubilant at the success of his little play.

What might have happened next is a matter of conjecture, for a diversion was created by the sudden arrival of Joel Tubbs with New York papers, several hours late.

"I mightn't 'a' brought 'em round tonight," he explained, "but I thought you gents'd like ter see what the news was from the missing ship."

With an anxiety of his own, Lessing seized one of the newspapers and scanned it eagerly.

"The Colossus has turned up!" he announced presently. "After wandering for days in the gale, she landed on the coast of Newfoundland. All the passengers are safe, and most of them are now bound for New York or their homes."

"Thank Heaven, they're all safe!" said John Taylor fervently.

Guthrie, nursing his shattered pride, managed to murmur some expression of satisfaction.

"Now we shall have the travelers back with us," said Lessing. "Dear old Whitcomb will be here presently to settle some of our friendly little differences, gentlemen."

The other two looked at him and found little to say. His buoyant satisfaction was too much for their skepticism.

But behind his satyr-like smile was a mind busily at work. For he knew that the jig was up. By hook or crook he must be away from the place by another day.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEATHER AGAIN.

JOEL TUBBS, after discussing the newspaper reports, informed the company that the snow had set in again, and predicted a bad blow before morning.

And in substantiation of his judgment, the wind began to howl in the chimney and gusts of sleet slapped noisily upon the window-panes.

Joel left the house after a comfortable chat with Lessing, and John Taylor was for going home. But Lessing, who now had a claim upon his favor, persuaded him to telephone his father that the storm was too severe, and he would remain at the Whitcomb house for the night.

They retired early, with curt nods and little speech, although the youngster slipped a word to Lessing to the effect that he was sorry for any mistakes that had been made.

Morning dawned, and through rifts in the icy coating on the window-panes the three men saw the hill country about them snow-bound and glacial.

The storm still raged unabated, and promised to break all records if it held through the day.

Lessing had framed half a dozen excuses for getting a train to New York that day. The Whitcombs might already be in the city or approaching it, and his margin of safety was narrowing.

But now an immediate escape seemed doubtful. No train could run in such a blizzard. But neither could the Whitcombs indulge any immediate desire to repair to their country place.

It was a tedious, gloomy day. There was little or no speech between the men. Guthrie was sullen and wrathful. The youngster was uncomfortable in a dozen ways.

But Lessing concealed his uneasiness behind a mask of sarcastic flippancy.

It was just after nightfall that a locomotive whistle sounded through the roar of the storm.

The men started up and listened, each of them stirred by a different emotion.

"I didn't suppose a train could get through such a storm," said Taylor.

"No more did I," said Lessing, with a vague feeling of apprehension.

Twice again they heard the whistle and then no more. They talked about it idly for a while and then let it pass.

About half an hour later shouts came to their ears from the direction of the road.

Lessing put his shoulder against the front door, to keep the wind from bursting it inward, and opened it slightly. Three struggling figures were toiling through the drifts and driving storm, and one of them was carrying a cumbersome burden.

"Some people are coming toward the house," he said to the two inquiring men behind him, and his voice was unnatural, for he felt a sinking dread that something was about to happen.

Up to the porch labored the wayfarers, and the three men of the house ventured out to meet them and drag them into the hard-earned haven of refuge. There was Joel Tubbs, his man from the store, a woman of middle age, and a young girl, whom Joel carried in his arms.

They could not speak for a while. The storm had taken their voices and their breath. But the heat revived them and Joel was presently able to speak.

"Lordy! we're all mos' done fer!" he moaned. "The train got through—somehow—I dunno how—after bein' ten hours late from New York. Miss Stella, here, an' her aunt, Mrs. Fox, come along up ahead o' the family, an' they got stuck on the train without anythin' to eat, an' now poor little Miss Stella's mighty sick. She couldn't walk a bit, an' I had ter tote 'er all the way from the station."

The elder woman of the party had been moaning feebly and rocking violently in a chair by the fire, but she soon found her voice and turned loose a torrent of feminine protest against the powers of the elements, the inadequacy of railroads, and the blind lunacy of human beings in general.

"That poor child," she wailed, pointing to the form of the girl where they had laid her on a coach, "she's been ill for the last eight or ten hours. She's in fearful pain, but there wasn't a doctor on the train, and this was the only place we could come to. The train is stuck for good now, and I guess it's lucky we got as far as this. We might have been left to freeze and starve in the woods."

The girl on the couch was saying nothing. She was palpably too ill to talk, and only groaned rythmically and writhed in violent pain.

Young John Taylor was solicitously chafing her hands, while Guthrie stood by, advising hot drinks and a score of remedies.

"What is the matter, Stella?' cried Taylor, his anguish only second to the girl's.

"Lord! We know only too well what's the matter," wailed Mrs. Fox. "The poor child's got appendicitis. She had it first on the steamer, and her father stopped it with medicine. He said if she had it again, she'd have to have an immediate operation to save her.

"But he didn't think she was liable to have it very soon again. It took her after we left New York, and all we could do in this awful storm was to come here, and I guess she'll just about die. Oh, she does suffer so!"

"By the greatest luck in the world, we have Dr. Lessing here," announced Taylor, with a loyalty growing out of a new friendliness for the adventurer. "He'll save her, Mrs. Fox. He's one of the biggest surgeons in the West."

"Thank Heaven!" cried the good lady fervently.

"It is fortunate indeed," said Guthrie, with peculiar emphasis, and his eye was on Lessing.

It was a horrible moment.

Lessing was game for almost any of life's exigencies, but the adventuring had gone too far. The frail form on the couch smote him to the heart, and he felt his face pale before the searching glance of Guthrie.

To cover his confusion, he went over to the girl and affected to feel her pulse. She was feverish, and her face, as beautiful as any face he had ever seen, was a picture of mortal agony.

He was overwhelmed and crushed with biting shame. For the first time in his vagabond life he felt his unworthiness. From his present horror at the ordeal presented to him, his thoughts went to himself and told him with bitterness that he was unlike other men—that he was unfit to touch

the hand of this young girl. He was a waster—a low swindler of humanity.

He murmured some words of sympathy and walked falteringly into Whitcomb's study to think.

"My brother's instruments are all in there, doctor," called Mrs. Fox. "She's got it pretty bad this time, doctor, and I guess you can see there's no time to lose. I'm a born nurse and you can count on me. But, oh, doctor, please, please hurry!"

Lessing glanced round the study in a dumb confusion. There were instruments galore and the mysterious paraphernalia of the profession. There were knives of all sizes, polished and clean and brilliant, but of what good were they? In his hands they would only mean deliberate murder.

"Oh, hurry, doctor, hurry!" repeated the woman from the next room. "She will die, if you don't."

Suddenly Lessing thought of Bemis, the old doctor of Brimton. He might do the work. But how could he get out of it? He had posed as a great physician, and now captious fortune had put him to the deadly test.

Fresh groans came from the tortured girl.

"For Heaven's sake, how long will it take you, doctor?" cried young Taylor.

"I'll hurry," answered Lessing, and continued to stand there, gaping and hating himself.

To create a diversion, he rattled some of the instruments together and took hold of the steel operating-table which stood in a corner of the room, dragging it on its rollers into the middle of the floor.

Then an inspiration came to him from the gods.

The head-rest of the table could be raised or lowered, and it worked upon a strong, steel ratchet. He gazed at the mechanism and cringed slightly at his thoughts.

With a sudden squaring of his shoulders, he seized the head-rest and raised it. He paused a moment, set his teeth together, and thrust his right hand beneath the ratchet, with grim resolution.

Another pause—a long, gasping breath—and he let the head-rest fall. The large saw-teeth of the ratchet caught his hand and crushed it.

He screamed involuntarily, and reeled with dizziness at the frightful pain.

Almost simultaneously young Taylor sprang toward him. He wondered, in his dazed condition, that the young man happened to be so near.

Despite the proximity of the women, Taylor swore at him and cursed him for his carelessness.

"Oh, what did you do it for? How could you?" he cried. "Now what can we do. Stella! She'll die! And it'll be your fault!"

Lessing gritted his teeth and recovered himself. Grimly he raised the head-rest with his left hand and released the shattered member.

"She sha'n't die," he said firmly. "We must get Dr. Bemis. Quick—run to the telephone. He must come!"

Guthrie, in obedience to sharp orders, went to the telephone. He held the receiver to his ear for a long while, and there was no response.

The wind howled round the house with fresh violence, and the sleet dashed against the panes.

"We might have known!" said Taylor. "The wires are down."

"Then we must go for Bemis," said Lessing.

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Guthrie. "No living thing could get over the two miles to Brimton. You don't know these mountain-storms."

"I know mountain-storms in other parts of the world, such as you never dreamed of," said Lessing, "and I'll go!"

"No, it's my place to go!" cried Taylor. "I'll go if it kills me, to save Stella."

"Come now, no heroics," said Lessing firmly. "If any one goes, it shall be me."

But he staggered and had to lean against the table for support. The pain was almost overwhelming him.

Guthrie saw his white face and brought a flask of brandy. The spirits revived him, and he ordered them to help him bandage his hand and get ready to face the storm.

One of the fingers was fractured, but they disregarded it and swathed the hand roughly in bandage-gauze.

From up-stairs Guthrie brought a sweater, a fur cap, a pair of boots, and a rough reefer. They dressed him in them hurriedly. He could not help himself. The pain was the most exquisite he had ever known and he groaned in spite of himself with every breath.

There was nothing natural about the proceedings. Every one was too excited and unnerved to thing logically.

When they had wrapped a woolen muffler about his head and ears, he opened the door

with his left hand and threw himself out into a huge drift of snow and was gone with scarcely a word to any one.

He had thought of opiates for the suffering girl, but he dared not give them, fearing to kill her, in his ignorance of drugs. And he thanked fortune that no one else had thought of it.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONSULTATION BY FORCE.

THE story of the two-mile journey would be a long one to tell. Men have lived through such things before — men wounded and maimed so badly that ordinary tasks would seem too great for them. Human flesh will stand more than can readily be believed when it comes to actual extremity.

He fell in the overpowering drifts several times, and twice he gave up and lay still to die, but the thought of the dying girl back at the house brought his own life back and he struggled on.

Four hours after plunging into the storm, he dragged himself up to the porch of Dr. Bemis's house in Brimton and fell, calling feebly for help.

The old doctor heard the cry above the storm and came out to him, after an age or two, with a lantern. He dragged the almost dead man into the house, took off some of his wrappings and labored to get life into him before it should be too late.

Another half hour went by, and then Lessing sat up and recovered his wits.

"Now we've got to get back!" was the first thing he said.

"What're you talking about?" asked the doctor.

"Get ready quick. We've got to go right back to Whitcomb's," said Lessing. "Stella Whitcomb—she's dying with appendicitis. You—you have got to save her!"

"I don't know whether you're plumb crazy or what," said the old doctor, "but I do know that no sane man will go out in this storm. You're only alive because fools are always taken care of—somehow."

"You've got to go, I tell you!" Lessing almost screamed.

"All I know is, you've got to go to bed here and be taken care of till you're better," snapped the doctor.

Then Lessing began to cry. He leaned weakly forward, as he sat on the couch where Bemis had placed him, and sobbed like a schoolboy.

"Plumb gone outer your head," said Bemis sorrowfully.

But Lessing was thinking. He must do something more. If Bemis would not listen to him, there must be some other way. He was wearing his own trousers, and in the hip pocket he knew there was an automatic pistol.

He struggled to his feet, still sobbing, and backed away from the doctor. He reached round with his left hand and drew forth the gun.

Bemis cried out in wild alarm and sprang toward him, but he pointed the gun at his head and dared him to come nearer.

"Now," he said, with a sinister intonation, "you'll do as I say! Get into your clothes and come. I lived through it, and I'll live through it again, and you've got to come with me."

Bemis was a courageous old countryman, and his fear changed to cool reasoning. Men often held each other up with guns, he thought, but they rarely fired them. Gun play is largely a bluff, and it can be "called."

"You're a poor sick man," he said soothingly. "You wouldn't hurt me with that, even if you had the strength to do it. You just go on crying, if it makes you feel better, but put down the gun and I'll put you to bed and fix you up comfortable."

Lessing had forgotten for a moment what the matter was all about. He had to search his brain to find out why he had pointed the revolver at the old man. Then it all came back again and he resolved to have no more delay.

His hand trembled a good deal, but he nerved himself to steady it. He sighted carefully, and remembered with satisfaction that he had been a crack revolver shot, once upon a time.

A look of terror came into the face of the doctor. He threw out his arms and screamed at the man who gazed at him like a maniac.

The pistol barked and a piece of cloth was cut neatly from the sleeve of the doctor's coat.

In his fright he dropped to the floor and begged for mercy.

"There are nine more shots in this automatic pistol," said Lessing, "and each one of the nine will cut a little deeper. Are you coming?"

The old doctor groveled at his feet and promised to go through fire for him.

"Wait here, please," he begged, "I'll go and get ready. I will not be long."

But Lessing was cunning.

"You'll stay right here," he said; "I'll get your clothes right here in the hall by the door. You stay where you are, or there'll be some more shooting."

He staggered out into the hall and groped for the doctor's great coat and muffler on the hat-stand. Suddenly everything grew dark and he almost lost consciousness. He clung to the gun and kept just out of sight of the doctor, that he might not perceive his sudden weakness. He tried to rally his failing strength, but it only ebbed and ebbed.

It grew still darker and he found it hard to think at all.

Then a cry sounded just outside the door.

"Lessing! Lessing!" called some one.

The semiconscious man came back to himself for a moment. He straightened up and peeked into the room at the doctor.

The doctor was creeping toward the door, it seemed, so he fired a shot over his head to warn him. He decided, in a far-off, silly sort of a way that the next time the old man tried to fool him he would shoot to kill. Nothing seemed to matter very much now.

He had forgotten the call at the door by this time, but it was repeated, and he stumbled back and jerked open the door with what little strength he had left.

Young Taylor almost fell into the hall. He had made the battle with the storm too, and was there to tell the tale.

"I had to come, Lessing," he gasped. "I thought you'd die. And I had to come, too."

Lessing began to laugh then.

"Here—" he said foolishly. "Take th' gun. O-old man don' wan'er come. Do-don' wan'er save Stella. I'm goin' 'sleep. You kill 'im."

Lessing fell to the floor senseless then, and the doctor came out of his mad fright when he saw that the newly arrived lunatic was not disposed to gunplay, and set about to care for the two men; for Taylor was almost as far spent as Lessing had been, though he had no wound to sap his vitality.

Old Mrs. Bemis had fainted away upstairs, at the first report of the pistol, and she too had to be revived.

With so much excitement, some of the doctor's old-time courage and energy came back to him, and when Taylor was able to tell a coherent story, he listened to it and yielded to his entreaties.

The "hired man" was routed from his room over the stable and pressed into service as an able-bodied escort. Daylight had come, and it was easier to pick a direct route through the storm.

Responsibility gives strength to men, and the resolute young Taylor, intent upon making the return journey, had to be helped and encouraged on the way.

The three men arrived at the Whitcomb house at ten o'clock in the morning.

The exhausted old doctor rested for an hour, and then he performed the operation upon the girl, without fuss or feathers.

Country doctors are accustomed to doing such things without much anxiety over technique or asepsis, and the operations are successful in an astonishing number of cases.

Mrs. Fox assisted him with the anesthetic. The Whitcomb surgical appliances were elaborate and modern, so the conditions were better than the old doctor had found in scores of cases where quick action was the one hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

LESSING'S GETAWAY.

ON the day after the operation, the rotary plows of the railroad company fought their way through the drifts, and a train came through from the city, bearing Dr. Whitcomb and the rest of the family.

Stella was comfortable and in little danger of further trouble. Taylor was made the hero of the hour by Mrs. Fox, and in his sudden rise in favor, he swore Guthrie to silence.

For Guthrie's stock had fallen rather low. According to Mrs. Fox he had played an inconspicuous part in the heroic deeds of the time of storm and stress, and he was looked upon as an outsider.

They all went over to see Lessing. Dr. Bemis was caring for him tenderly, and watching for signs of gangrene in the crushed hand.

The question was, who was Lessing anyway? Whence came this prominent surgeon of the West, who had appeared so mysteriously in the recent affairs?

Of course it would all have to come out soon or late, but young Taylor delayed the storm. He claimed him as a friend of his

who had been staying for a bit with him and Guthrie at the house. A fat bribe sealed the lips of Joel Tubbs, and all was serene for the hour.

Ten days after, Lessing was able to leave the house of his friend, the old doctor, and he lost no time in making direct tracks for the city.

Nothing was said about his departure. He went quietly to the station, accompanied only by John Taylor.

When they heard the whistle of the engine in the distance, the youngster wrung the left hand of his strange new friend and bade him good-by with a catch in his voice.

"Where are you going, Lessing?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll knock about awhile," said Lessing, "and then I suppose it will be back to Portland."

"Don't keep up the game with me, old man," said Taylor pathetically. "Can't you see how I've had to work to shield you? I couldn't have done it, if I hadn't known all about you. You know I suspected you from the first. Then I couldn't help liking you. And when you smashed your hand to save yourself open disgrace, I—I saw you do it. I was just coming into the room. Then I knew everything.

"After you've gone, the story will leak out, but I've saved you so far."

Lessing thought deeply for a while.

"You're a white man, Taylor," he said simply, at last. "I ought to have seen through it all. Now I think of it, I've been practically a prisoner at the Bemis house. You've done it all like a diplomat.

"I don't know where I'll go now. I'll write to you when I get settled somewhere. I want to see you again. I'm going to do something—for myself—now. I can't go back to the old way, you know, after some of the things that have happened. I guess your little sick girl there on the couch started me in waking up. I want to be a man—if I can manage it."

The train pulled in then, and they just shook hands and parted.

When John Taylor started away from the station, he met Dr. Whitcomb coming down the street.

"Say, Jack, I've just heard the most incredible yarn about that fellow, Dr. Lessing," he said. "Joel Tubb's man up at the post-office, says somebody's been lying to me, and that Lessing lived in my house for weeks. I simply can't get head or tail to the yarn."

"I guess I can explain it, sir," said Taylor. "Just wait till we get up to the house. And please remember, doctor, that Lessing did just as much—yes, by Jove, he did a whole lot more to save Stella's life than I did."

(The end.)

The Wrong Green.

BY NEVIL G. HENSHAW.

Jim Wiley Runs Up Against Another Old Hyena Who Has as Broad a Grin as He.

"WHY is it that, among your many modes of impoverishing the public, I have never heard you mention the green-goods system?" I once asked my friend, Jim Wiley. "Is it because of some unfortunate experience similar to the one in the gold-brick field?"

The old grafter nodded sadly.

"It is," he replied. "At one time green goods was an excellent graft, and I've worked it in several instances to my profit. Then I got hit by the inventive fever, and tried to stick an extra finish on to the end of the scheme. I got the finish all right, but it was my own.

"I've seen somewhere that they strain dynamite through old hats, and then throw the hats away. I was like one of them wise guys that you read about in the newspapers, who finds a hat and tries to revive it with a sledge hammer. Since then I've had sense enough to quit things when I get to the end of 'em.

"But you'll understand better when I explain the trouble. It happened several years ago, and it come about something like this.

"One day I got a letter from a lawyer in Richmond saying that my friend Hick Patterson was dead, and that he'd willed me everything he had, including what was left of himself. The letter likewise stated that, as Hick was still occupying his room at his lodging-house, and as his month had just run out, I'd better send instructions, if I didn't want to pay another thirty days' board.

"I wired at once to plant poor Hick with all due pomp and ceremony, and to charge the expenses to the estate. I likewise ordered some palm leaves, as, Hick having been in the green-goods business, I thought they'd be more appropriate than flowers. Then I caught the first train for the Old Dominion, feeling like the young husband does when his rich uncle forgives him in the last act.

"Of course I knew why Hick had left me his pile. Three years before we'd played the mosquito circuit, on the Texas coast, with a street fair. Our offering was 'Oto the Human Chameleon,' and we done a rushing business while it lasted.

"Our outfit consisted of a small, pint-size tent, and two chairs. Likewise a picture of a sixty-foot alligator, with a head like something between the darky's delight and the Mammoth Cave. It had been painted by a canvasman with D. T.'s, and, when he come to and seen what he'd done, he took the pledge.

"Oto was an old darky we'd picked up in jail, and, outside of his eating six meals a day, the only thing he was remarkable for as a freak was for not being remarkable. I done the spieling, and, after the suckers got inside, Hick explained how Oto changed his color each year, and how, at the present moment, he happened to be black. For a while we was the hit of the fair.

"One day, in the middle of an exhibition, I heard something behind me that sounded like the mob scene in Julius Cæsar. I stopped spieling, and reached down for the cash box and a pair of brass knucks I kept alongside.

"When I peeped into the tent, there was Oto in the embrace of a three hundred-pound colored female. She had him round the neck with one arm, and she was swinging a cotton umbrella with the other in a manner that would have made the average pile-driver look like a game of ping-pong."

"'Oto, is you?' she was yelling. 'I'll Oto you. You'll leave your wife an' fambily to fool roun' sech truck es dis, will you? I'll show you who's de human lizard when I gits you home.'

"The rest of the spectators had Hick backed into a corner. One of 'em was making passes at him with a piece of tent-rope, and another had pulled a forty-five. They might have been teaching him to tie a true lover's knot, but I had my doubts.

"I slipped on my knucks and broke into the crowd like a shot out of a gun.

"'Run for your lives!' I yells. 'The trained lions have broke loose, and they're headed this way!'

"I'm happy to say that the crowd dispersed as one man. They took our tent with 'em, and five or six more that happened to get in their way. After me and Hick had pried ourselves loose, we decided that we'd enter some business that wasn't so wearing on the nerves. We likewise figured that the fair authorities might be a trifle put out about the tents, and our not using the knucks as per instructions.

"So this was what Hick had had in mind when he made me his heir. I knew he'd been grateful, but I never thought he'd go so far. It was like casting a biscuit into a mud-puddle and getting back the American Bread Trust.

"When I got to Richmond I made a beeline to the lawyer's to see what sort of a strangle-hold he had on my inheritance. He was a thin, measly little man with gray hair and red eyes, and he looked like a badly discouraged white rat.

"'The lately lamented Mr. Patterson was a friend of mine,' says he; 'a close, personal friend, if I may make bold to say it. On more than one occasion I've stood between his enemies and himself.'

"'The enemies being twelve in number,' says I. 'I've been there, likewise. But let's talk about something pleasant. How much did the lately lamented Mr. Patterson leave?'

"'In genuine money, something over one

thousand dollars,' says the lawyer. 'After deducting all bills and expenses, and my fees as executor, a good six hundred remains. How will you have it, in a check or bills?'

"'In a check,' says I. 'Then it's more apt to come up to the specifications of a good six hundred. If anything else turns up, you can settle it out of Hick's stock in trade. Some one's liable to get into trouble if we try to realize on the rest of the estate, and it might as well be you.'

"After I'd cashed my check, I went round to Hick's lodging-house and interviewed the landlady on the subject of personal property.

"'There's only a trunk, and it's all packed and locked just like he left it,' says she. 'Poor, poor, Mr. Patterson! His memory will always be green.'

"'It will,' says I, and I ordered a transfer wagon and had the trunk sent up to my hotel.

"That afternoon I broke open the lock with a cold-chisel, and went through Hick's effects. Most of 'em was clothes of the extreme or Mardi Gras variety, and, as they was too loud to sell, and too small to wear, I figured 'em at what the insurance companies call a total loss. Packed away at the bottom of the trunk was a letter-file, and I pulled it out and opened it, hoping I'd find something that would let me break even on the deal.

"Inside was the letters and descriptions of every sucker that had done business with Hick in the past five years. Each of 'em was numbered and filed in its proper place, and it was the most businesslike piece of graftsmanship I've ever seen.

"I skimmed through a few of the letters, and it didn't take me long to find out that the lawyer hadn't been joking about the genuine money, and that in more than one case Hick had actually delivered the goods. Where he got 'em I don't know, but the fact of his having had 'em made me feel like there was a dozen grand juries in the room.

"You see there's considerable difference between promising a man green goods, and selling 'em to him. One is a graft and the other is a felony, and the distinction between the two is anywheres from five to ten years.

"I've followed the profession ever since I was sixteen, and I can truthfully say that I've never once stepped over the line. It ain't ethical, and it ain't safe.

"After I'd been through the trunk and the pockets of the clothes, and had seen that there wasn't any loose bills laying round, I went back to the file. Being only interested in what information I could get, I passed up the letters and stuck to the descriptions that was pasted alongside. I run through the alphabet till I come to the S's, and then stopped at number one hundred and twenty-three. It read:

SPOTTS—HON. ALEXANDER.
Mayor and mill-owner — Spottsville, N. C.
Bought $5000 in mixed bills at 5 for 1.
Deal closed July 16, 19—.
N. G. for future business.
Personal description unknown.

"I read the description twice, and then looked the letters over. There was four of 'em—one answering Hick's steel engraved ad., another asking for samples and prices, and a third enclosing a thousand-dollar draft for the five thousand. The fourth was a three-page kick saying that the bills wasn't up to sample, and demanding the draft back again.

"All of the letters was in ink, and was signed in full, Hon. Alexander Spotts. They was written in one of them small, stingy handwritings, and, as most of 'em had spilled over on to the back of the page, I didn't need any personal description to tell me that the Hon. Alex was as tight as a pair of scissors.

"I lit a cigar and went through number one twenty-three again, and, by the time I'd finished, I was in the same position as the newspaper guy when he finds the hat. Then I went down to the office and wired Push Evans to join me on the first train.

"Push arrived the following afternoon. He'd been doing a black-face specialty with a medicine show, and he'd left so quick he'd forgotten to wash the black off from behind his ears.

"'I hope it's something good, Jim,' says he. 'I had a shell game on the side that I sure hated to leave.'

"'Don't worry,' says I. 'I've got something that'll make your shell game look like the combined charities. If you wasn't my partner, I'd play it alone.'

"We went up to my room, and I opened the file at number one hundred and twenty-three, and handed it to Push, feeling as proud as though I'd just discovered perpetual motion.

"'Well,' says he, when he'd finished

reading, 'what's the game? This interesting little piece of history having been pulled off several years ago, the party's probably dead, and, even if he isn't, he's marked N. G.'

"I give Push a smile such as an artist might hand to a sign painter.

"'The party is alive and still holding office, as per instructions received by wire this morning,' says I. 'As for the N. G. part, it's the usual hasty decision of a one-graft man. If Hick had had my experience and inventive genius, he'd have probably left me a mill in Spottsville, N. C. Don't the Hon. Alex's letters and signatures convey anything to your mind? Although I've never heard of him as an author, something tells me that these particular productions are liable to bring about a dollar a word.'

"Push understood, but he didn't seem to be very enthusiastic.

"'But is it worth while?' he asks. 'The business under discussion took place long ago, and I'm not especially anxious about going up against a small town mayor. Most of 'em are likewise police justices, and, in the few unfortunate experiences I've had with 'em, it's usually taken me about six months to crawl out of the small end of the horn.'

"I give Push one look of what is known among writers as extreme disgust.

"'Push,' says I, 'I'm surprised at you. Can't you see that the fact of the party's being mayor is what gives me the idea of my scheme? A plain, ordinary citizen would probably tell us to go as far as we liked, knowing that the matter was too old for much trouble. With a public man it's different. How would it look if one of these letters was to come out in the Hon. Alex's home paper?

"'Of course he's going to be troublesome, but he'll come across with proper handling. Read his last letter, and you'll see. If he hadn't been subject to cold feet, he'd never have wanted to return the bills. They must have been pretty good or he wouldn't have bought from the sample, and you know as well as I do that Hick had only one kind.'

"'And what is your plan of procedure?' asks Push.

"'I reckon we'd better be secret-service men,' says I. 'It'll be the most delicate way to open up the matter, and it'll save a lot of useless explanations. Even if the Hon. Alex does get next to us it won't make any difference. With them letters in his possession, he wouldn't be afraid of *Sherlock Holmes*. If you'll go out and find some badges, I'll see about a train.'

"We pulled out next morning on one of them three-car locals, and we had to get up so early in the morning to catch it that Push come mighty near meeting himself at the depot—coming in.

"We arrived at Spottsville at five-fifty-five that afternoon. It was mostly red clay and cotton, and it was so scattered it looked like some one had spilled it out of a balloon. Back of the station was a big cotton factory with 'Spottsville Mills' painted across it, and, just as we landed, the bell rung and the employees come piling outside.

"Most of 'em was under fifteen, and they looked like a crowd of lungers I once seen in New York State. Push sized 'em up as they come stumbling by, and begun to show the first interest I'd noticed since he arrived in Richmond.

"'Jim,' says he, 'if it's possible, I'll skin the Hon. Alex for all he's got. Just look what he's done to them kids. I wonder where a man like him goes to when he dies?'

"'I don't know,' says I, 'but you can bank on one thing. Whichever place it is, it's the cheapest.'

"The main street of the town was Spottsville Avenue, and, when we got to the principal and only hotel, we found it had been christened the Spottsville House. Everything in the place was Spotts-something-or-other, and, if one of the inhabitants had met with any form of violent death, I reckon the coroner's jury would have brought in a verdict of smallpox.

"After me and Push had registered as buyers for a wholesale garment house, I rung up the Hon. Alex and made an engagement for twelve the following morning. The clerk smiled at me as I come back from the phone.

"'It's a good thing you're buying,' says he. 'If tickets to heaven was selling for a cent apiece, the mayor'd take a chance on getting a pass.'

"'Is he as bad as that?' asks Push.

"'He's worse,' says the clerk. 'Last year he had himself elected deacon of his church so he could pass the plate. He always antes up last, and they've took in enough buttons to start a clothing store.'

"'All of which will help,' says I, when

we got up to our room. 'With the combination of mayor and deacon, the matter ought to be a cinch.'

"Me and Push turned up at the mill at eleven-forty the next morning, and was shown into a private office that was about as handsomely furnished as a jail. The Hon. Alex arrived promptly at twelve.

"He was six-foot-two of grouch and meanness, with a high bald head, and a bunch of gray whiskers, that made him look like he had his face on upside down.

"Me and Push rose up to shake hands, but he give a grunt, and walked round us like we was a condemned bridge. Then he sat down at his desk, and begun to open his mail.

"I'd come with the intention of opening up on him by degrees, but, after we'd sat fifteen minutes, I was so mad I could hardly wait for him to speak the first word.

"'Well, gents,' says he, looking at us like we was delegates to a poultry show, 'what can I do for you? Speak quick, as time is money, and I'm a busy man. You travel for a garment-house, I believe?'

"'Although our house don't make a specialty of garments,' says I, 'they certainly have a line of their own. All of 'em has black stripes on a white ground which, in view of the spotted condition of this community, ought to be a relief to you.'

"The Hon. Alex flushed up till his head looked like one of them fancy Chinese dinner gongs.

"'Young man,' says he, reaching for a bell, 'your remarks, though humorous, are difficult to understand. I'll give you exactly one minute to explain yourself.'

"I threw back my coat till my badge was in sight, and motioned Push to do the same.

"'A minute'll be enough,' says I, 'especially as you'll have from five to ten years in which to figure out the true meaning of my remarks. If you'll notice the plain, but massive, ornaments on the vests of my friend and myself, you'll see that we're secret-service men. We're likewise intensely interested in a little green-goods deal you once pulled off with a party by the name of Patterson.'

"The Hon. Alex faded down to the color of a public towel, and he done it so quick it was like turning off a light.

"'I don't know what you're talking about,' says he. 'I haven't the slightest idea of what you mean by "green goods," and, if ever I have had any business association with a gentleman by the name of Patterson, the matter has escaped my mind.'

"I pulled the letters out of my pocket and held 'em up so he could see 'em.

"'Then perhaps this'll refresh your memory,' says I.

"The Hon. Alex give one look, and then jumped to his feet like he'd been having an argument with a bumblebee. He had a long reach, and if ever he'd got his hands on the letters it'd been like putting 'em through a corn-shredder, but Push stopped him with a little jew-jewtsky before he got half-way.

"I put up the letters and settled back in my chair.

"'That'll do, Mr. Mayor,' says I. 'If we'd had any doubt about your being the right party, which we hadn't, we'd be perfectly willing to go before a jury now. Having gone this far, I want to warn you that anything you say or do'll be used against you.'

"The Hon. Alex slumped down in his chair and begun to fold up in sections, like a pocket-rule. It it hadn't been for the kids we'd seen the day before, I believe I'd have come mighty near feeling sorry for him.

"'I'm at your mercy, gents,' he whines. 'What do you propose to do?'

"'We're going to take you back to Washington with us,' says I, 'and there's going to be mighty little proposing about it. We didn't have much trouble in getting Patterson and his lay-out, but you're the first confederate we've been able to locate.'

"'But I'm not a confederate,' pleads the Hon. Alex. 'I'm only the innocent victim of a professional sharper. I acted on the spur of the moment, and, after I'd thought the matter over, and had seen the wrong of it, I tried to return the bills. I've never tried to pass a single one of them.'

"'Tell it to the judge,' says I. 'Being in public life yourself, he may recognize the profession.'

"'But think of my family, my position in this community,' he groans. 'Any one of those letters would ruin me.'

"'Just at present,' says I, 'we're too busy to think about anything but the reward.'

"The Hon. Alex shook out a half dozen joints, and straightened up like he'd begun to take notice.

"'Ah!' says he. 'So there is a reward? May I inquire it's amount?'

"'You may,' says I. 'Roughly speak-

ing, I should say that these letters ought to be worth about five hundred apiece.'

"The Hon. Alex folded up again and give a sigh like the puncturing of a rear tire.

"'That will be two thousand dollars,' says he in a weak voice. 'It is a lot of money—a whole lot of money, young man. Will you sell at that price?'

"'Mr. Mayor,' says I, as stern as I could, 'I'm surprised at one in your position making such an offer. Outside of its being rank bribery, it ain't safe for either party. There's only one way them letters can get out of my possession, and that's by losing 'em. If, in such an event, I was to run across two thousand dollars while looking for 'em, I'd probably pick up the money first.'

"The Hon. Alex thought for about five minutes, and then give the original grin that they used in modeling the hyena.

"'Gents,' says he, 'whereas I am your prisoner, you can't get north till the four o'clock express. Therefore I would like to ask an hour or so in which to bid good-by to my family and arrange my affairs. At the end of that time I'll go willingly enough if you still want me.

"'Under the circumstances, I hardly feel justified in offering you the hospitality of my home, but there are several views about here which you might visit with profit during your enforced delay. Lover's Leap, a small bluff within easy driving distance of our town, is especially interesting on account of an oak upon its edge. In this oak is a cavity known as the Lover's Post-Office, and, tradition has it, that if one will visit the cavity promptly at the hour of two, he will find a letter for his pains.'

"I got up, and put on my hat, and Push done the same.

"'Very well, Mr. Mayor,' says I. 'We'll give you the three hours to arrange your affairs. Then, if we want you, we'll meet you here. Of course you realize what your paper'll have to say in the event of your trying to escape? In regard to the Lover's Leap proposition, I think we'll take it in. We'll likewise carry a couple of guns in case we run across any game.'

"We went down-town, and engaged a buggy, and inquired the way to Lover's Leap. Then we had an early dinner, and pulled out to collect our mail at the old oak tree.

"'Well, Push,' says I, as we drove along, 'don't this beat your shell game?'

"'It beats any game I've ever played,' says he. 'If things go through, I vote we keep on to the next town before catching the train. I've seen some suspicious people in my life, but none like the mayor. If he was twins, he'd be having himself arrested all the time.'

"'Your first point it well taken,' says I. 'As for your second, it's only the Hon. Alex's way. If ever he gets to heaven, he'll count the strings on his harp each time he lays it down.'

"We arrived at Lover's Leap promptly at two. It was mostly weeds and underbrush, and the bluff was a small welt, such as might have been raised by tapping the earth gently with a club. It was less than four foot high, and would have done the average lover about as much good as stepping off a car.

"Me and Push, however, was mostly interested in the tree. It stood over on the edge of the bluff, and, sure enough, there was a hole in it with something white showing inside. After we'd examined the underbrush, we cat-footed over to it with our guns in our hands, and, if a squirrel had jumped out of the hole when we reached into it, I don't believe we'd have quit running till we got back to Richmond.

"As we'd expected, the white thing was an envelope. It was long, and fat, and inside was a bunch of bills. After we'd counted 'em and seen that the two thousand was all there, I put the letters in the envelope, and slipped it back in the hole. Then we returned to our buggy, and pulled out for the next town in a manner that would have most trotting races look like a funeral cortège.

"We caught the express by the skin of our teeth, and it was not till we was in a drawing-room, and fifty miles from the city of Spottsville, that I cut loose with the thoughts that was thronging my mind.

"'Behold the fruits of inventive genius,' says I to Push, as we was dividing the roll. 'Most people would have considered the book of Patterson as closed, but not your Uncle Wiley. If ever I get tired of professional life, I'll patent my grafts and retire a millionaire.'

"'Jim, you're a wonder,' says Push. 'And now where to? Don't you think that, in view of the money's coming from where it has, we ought to stop off and give Raleigh a whirl?'

"'Raleigh it is,' says I, and, as I spoke,

I was in about the same position as the other wise guy when he lifts the hammer."

The old grafter paused and mournfully contemplated the burned out fragment of his cigar.

"But what was the matter?" I asked. "Didn't you get away with the long green?"

Wiley smiled sardonically.

"Oh, yes," said he. "We got away with it all right, but it turned out to be the wrong green. We hadn't been in the Tar Heel metropolis five hours before we was arrested by twenty people at once.

"Each of 'em had an Exhibit A in his good right hand, and it took six weeks, and all my inheritance, and everything me and Push could beg, borrow, or steal, before we got matters right again. I've never been able to understand how we escaped going over the road."

"So the Hon. Alex paid you with counterfeit money, did he?" I asked, well knowing what the answer would be.

"Of course he did," replied Wiley. "It was some of the very lot we'd come down to arrest him for."

THE FISHER-FOLK.

SING ho, as the sail runs up the mast!
Sing ho, as the wind comes swinging past!
The sailors sing as the sea-gulls fling
Their screams to the rising blast;
Oh, it's life to live on the open sea,
There is health in the briny air;
The tossing waves are no man's slaves
As they riot everywhere.
It's good to catch the spray in your face,
To stretch out your arms and be,
With hand and heart, a living part
Of life on the open sea!

The women stand on the shore and wait,
And the children play in the sand;
The women stand on the shore and wait,
While the children grow to man's estate,
But they do not understand;
For the song of the sailor is new to them,
And the open sea is there;
The tossing waves are no man's slaves
As they riot everywhere.

Sing ho, as the sail runs up the mast!
Sing ho, as the wind comes swinging past!
Oh, it's life to live on the open sea,
And the men go forth right cheerily.
The sea-gulls scream as they screamed of yore,
The blast comes down with its threatening roar,
The waves bring dead things to the shore,
But the sailor sings to the open sea—
It is life and love and liberty!

The women stand on the shore and wait,
And the children play in the sand;
The women stand on the shore and wait—
Ah me, they understand;
Yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, they wait,
But the children play in the sand!

William J. Lampton.

Mystery of the Peplona Man.*

BY ELBERT D. WIGGIN,

Author of "Not for Sale," "Nobody's Fool," etc.

What a Son Found After Patient Hunting for His Father's Deadliest Foe.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

PETTIBONE'S father has been hounded to his grave through the machinations of one Max Eaglestone, who made it appear that he—the elder Pettibone—had been a rascal in business. The mother died soon afterward, and it thereupon became the son's purpose in life to find Eaglestone and avenge his wrongs. One morning he sees the fellow in the window of an express in the New York Subway. As he himself is on a local, there is not much hope of overtaking him, but he tries his best, only to have the pursuit interrupted by a fall to the tracks, and a scorching from the third rail. At the hospital, he makes the acquaintance of a queer fellow in the next cot—one Samuel J. Talbot, who has been injured in a street accident on the same day as Pettibone himself.

Talbot keeps raving about six years he claims the doctors have stolen out of his life, as he can remember nothing later than half a dozen years back. In his accident his face has been so disfigured that the doctors are building him a new one. Pettibone seeks to amuse him by drawing pictures—he being an artist—and one day after he had sketched the features of Max Eaglestone, Talbot calls out the name in great excitement, but his memory breaks off again, and he can explain nothing about it, nor what the man was to him.

Pettibone meanwhile recovers, finds that the Subway people are holding a pocketbook containing six thousand dollars dropped by a man answering Eaglestone's description, but there the trail ends again, except for the word "Kingston" from a scrap of envelope, which sends Pettibone out to hunt the various Kingstons in the country for his man.

In one of these towns he falls in again with his friend of the hospital, Talbot, back again now at his old trade of selling the Indian remedy Peplona. They form a partnership whereby Pettibone paints pictures to amuse the crowd while Talbot extols the virtues of Peplona. They do so well that they decide to move on New York, and Talbot leases a plot of ground on Stony Island where they begin the laying out of Peplona Park. Meantime, a yacht takes fire, and Pettibone rescues Harrison Gray's daughter, whose portrait he is afterward commissioned to paint. Mr. Gray invites both Pettibone and Talbot to dine.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING INTO SOCIETY.

AT the appointed hour the next evening the two partners duly presented themselves at the door of Harrison Gray's mansion.

Talbot was a sight to behold. In deference to Pettibone's protestations, he had regretfully abandoned the various gorgeous toilet accessories he had proposed wearing, and was in correct evening attire; but, even so, he fairly scintillated.

His expanse of bulging shirt-front was immaculately white, his garments were of the most fashionable cut and mode, the luster of his silk hat and polished shoes was mirror-like in its intensity.

Nor was his manner less impressive. Never did his glib tongue soar to loftier heights of eloquence; never were Pettibone's manifold merits more glitteringly set forth. To listen to him, one would have thought that the young painter was nothing less than a second Michelangelo.

In vain his blushing companion sought to halt his flowing periods, to turn the current of his speech into other channels; but Tal-

* This story began in The Cavalier for March.

bot was launched upon the subject nearest to his heart after Peplona, and he was not to be stopped.

The other members of the party, too, encouraged Talbot in his laudations, for it was evident that they likewise regarded the artist with favorable eyes; but Pettibone perceived that their host himself took little part in drawing out the orator. He seemed, on the other hand, to devote most of his attention to an exhaustive, if furtive, study of the man's personality, and his brow was frequently creased with a puzzled frown, as though he were seeking for something in the other's face which continually evaded him.

Again and again he would shake his head, as though convinced that he had been misled by a chance resemblance; then some turn of expression, or some tone in Talbot's voice, would start him off upon his quest afresh.

The sudden thought came into Pettibone's mind as he sat watching, that perhaps Gray had been acquainted with Talbot during some part of the lost years, and that it was owing to the change in his partner's facial appearance he now failed to recognize him; but almost immediately the reflection followed that Gray would certainly have been familiar with the name.

Indeed, as he remembered, it was the mention of Talbot's name which had convinced the yacht owner he was mistaken when he fancied he had detected a likeness to some one he knew in the portrait at the studio.

Nevertheless, he determined to question his host in regard to the matter; for he could not forget that the lifting of the veil over Talbot's past would probably disclose a clue whereby he himself might find Max Eaglestone.

But, even as he made the determination, and recalled the mission which he still regarded as his first duty, he heaved an involuntary sigh of regret.

For it may be observed that his eyes had not been wholly engrossed in watching Mr. Gray, but had also strayed occasionally to feast themselves upon the beauty of the daughter.

Quite recovered from her recent terrifying experience, she was the life and soul of the little company, and her dark, vivacious beauty was moreover of a type particularly appealing to Pettibone.

Indeed, as he gazed at her lovely, mobile face, his fingers fairly itched for a brush, and he congratulated himself over and over upon the opportunity which had been given him for transferring her features to canvas.

He could not have wished for a more alluring model; and yet he could easily understand why so many artists had failed. She would be difficult to paint, he could see that. While he sat watching her, he decided upon a dozen different poses, and discarded each in turn as she displayed some new and more enchanting turn of expression or lift of the head.

He had a chance to talk over the matter of the portrait with her later in the evening; and, while they were discussing questions of drapery and background, and making arrangements for the sittings, he found himself becoming more and more attracted to her. She was not only beautiful, but she was also a delightful companion, with a lively wit and a most sympathetic way of looking at things.

She did not attempt to overwhelm him with thanks for the part he had played in saving her life; but showed her appreciation more by her manner than in words, and this graceful exhibition of tact caused him to admire her more than ever.

Indeed, under the stimulus of her smiles, Pettibone never appeared to better advantage, and he was satisfied when he and Talbot were finally obliged to leave that he had made a by no means unfavorable impression in return.

So engrossed did he become, moreover, in entertaining the daughter that he quite forgot, until the opportunity had slipped by, his intention of seeking from the old man an explanation for the latter's attitude toward Talbot.

It recurred to him while he and his partner were making their way back to their lodgings, and his conscience gave him an uneasy twinge for this negligence in a matter which should have been his chief concern; but he impatiently justified himself by reflecting that it would be no very difficult task to secure another interview with his host. So he let his thoughts drift once more to a rapturous reverie upon the charms of his host's daughter.

Thus engaged, he was naturally silent; but Talbot, striding pantingly along beside him, evinced a desire for conversation.

"Scrumptious place Gray's got there, ain't it?" he commented, heedless of the other's air of aloofness.

"Very," assented Pettibone absently.

His mind was dwelling upon the enchanting manner in which a certain tendril of dark hair curled over Miss Gray's temple.

"Bang-up dinner," pursued Talbot.

"Quite so," laconically.

Pettibone was now endeavoring to recall on which side of her chin that bewitching dimple was located.

"Nice girl, the daughter?" once more essayed Talbot.

The other merely curled his lip scornfully in the darkness. Nice girl, indeed! What sort of an epithet was that to apply to such a dazzling, glorious creature?

A sudden realization of the situation came to the astute Talbot.

"Bob," he said, playfully digging Pettibone in the ribs, "I half believe you are a bit smitten in that direction?"

"Don't be an ass, Talbot," rejoined the other sharply. "What business has a pauper like myself—a Stony Island faker—got even to think of a lady in her position?"

In the awakening which Talbot's jest had brought to his rhapsodizing dreams, he spoke more bitterly than he was aware.

"Oh, I don't know," returned his partner with quick resentment. "The way it strikes me is that there can't be no nobler work than that of relievin' the afflicted and the distressed, even if it is at Stony Island. And as for being a pauper, if this scheme of ours works out you won't be so much to the bad before the summer's over.

"Bob," he went on in a tone of pained remonstrance, "I can't help feelin' that lately you're sort of beginnin' to despise Peplona. Don't do it, my boy; don't do it. You can see for yourself that it didn't bar us none from associatin' with them people to-night. They was swells; but, for all that, I never seen anybody that was more interested in hearin' about what Peplona will do. You've got to remember that fashionable folks has kidneys and livers just the same as the common herd, and Peplona ain't no respecter of persons when it comes to gettin' in its savin' work."

Pettibone, perceiving that he had really wounded his friend's feelings by his petulant outburst, at once set to work to convince Talbot that he had no especial grievance against Peplona, and succeeded so well that before they reached home the temporary cloud which had arisen between them was completely dispelled.

In fact, so thoroughly was the *entente cordiale* reestablished that under its influence Talbot divulged a project he had been revolving in secret for several days.

"Bob," he said, "I believe, as I told you, that we are going to make considerable money out of this deal of ours; but, whether we do or not, you've got to take a year off at the end of this season and finish up that art education of yours.

"I can keep hustlin' on this side of the water, and make enough for both of us; but it would surely be a shame for you to throw away any longer the wonderful talents you've got.

"Oh, you've got 'em, all right," as Pettibone strove to enter a murmured dissent. "My judgment may not amount to much, but that of those people we was with to-night does, and they say you are the real thing. Then, wouldn't it be a nice thing for me to keep you here, and turn you into a Stony Island faker, as you call it, when you could rank up with Raphael, and Rubens, and Beethoven, and painters like them, if you only had the chance?

"No, my boy," he went on, "as I've often said, it's never no trouble for me to make money, and the only thing that money is good for is to spend. Likewise, what I've got is yours; so, I don't care what you say, this time next year it's 'gay Paree' for yours, if I have to padlock you in a box and ship you by freight to get you there."

He waxed so emphatic in his insistence, and the plan was evidently one so close to his heart, that Pettibone didn't even try to argue him out of it then. His conscience smote him, too, that he should ever have uttered a word to pain this generous soul.

"Sam Talbot," he said, stopping short and clasping the other's hand in a hearty grip, "I have heard men called 'nature's noblemen' before now, but you are undoubtedly the individual for whom the phrase was coined."

Talbot reddened like a girl at this enthusiastic expression of sentiment, being so overcome, indeed, that he hardly opened his mouth again throughout the entire evening.

CHAPTER X.

A REMINDER OF THE PAST.

IT was hardly conceivable, however, that the experiences of the affair at the Gray's should have failed to incite the mind of the medicine vender to fresh activity, and breakfast was scarcely over the

next morning before the mental processes which had been in course of evolution began to demonstrate themselves in the usual fashion.

Pettibone well knew the symptoms, and he now sat amusedly watching Talbot's pursed-up lips and frowning brow, patiently awaiting the time when his reflections should turn to speech.

At length the oracle unbosomed itself.

"Bob," he observed, "that dinner we had last night has given me an idea. What is it that people want more than anything else on earth—more than art, more even than Peplona? Why, my boy, it's grub," he answered himself triumphantly; "something to eat!

"Now, why shouldn't we get the benefit of that craving? The crowds will come down to Stony Island, and we'll appeal to their spiritual natures with artistic representations of the gnarled woodland, and of the pastimes of the noble red man in his native haunts; we'll cater to their love of excitement with the thrilling spectacle of a fire at sea and a gallant rescue; we'll infuse new vigor into their afflicted insides with the aid of Peplona. But where, I ask you, does the normal, healthy, human appetite come in? That is something we have overlooked in our calculations."

"You think, then, it would be wise to run a restaurant in connection with the show?" put in Pettibone.

"Well, yes, that was about my idea," admitted Talbot, "although I wouldn't call it by that name, nor yet I wouldn't have it like all the rest of these eatin'-houses that a man runs across. To my mind, the public has had enough of 'Old Viennys,' and 'German Gardens,' and 'Japanee Tea-Houses,' and such.

"What I'd want to give 'em is an American gentleman's dining-room, with service and appointments like they'd find in them big mansions on upper Fifth Avenoo. That would be a novelty to them, and I'll bet my head it would make a hit, too. They ain't nothin' that's so fascinatin' to most people as to know how the Four Hundred live; and we'd show 'em, and make 'em pay for the privilege. Why, my boy"—his enthusiasm growing, the more he dwelt upon the project—"there's a barrel of money in it, a perfect barrel!

"We'd bring over a lot of English flunkies," he continued, expanding, as was his wont, into immediate details, "and we'd have the service and the china and the plate an exact copy of some big muck-a-muck's layout, only instead of havin' a crest on the dishes we'd have a medicine bottle, and on the front of all the waiters we'd have a big 'P' for Peplona, like they have the name of the club on a baseball player's uniform.

"I suppose," he continued anxiously, "it wouldn't be no trouble for you to get up a set of dining-rooms like some real ones in the smart set?"

"No, I don't believe so," Pettibone assured him. "There are two or three architects up-town who used to go to art school with me in the old days, and who would willingly give me all the pointers I need in the matter. I really believe it's a good scheme, Sam, but we don't want to forget that it will involve considerable additional expense. Have you taken into account that we will need a pretty substantial building for anything of the sort?"

"Yes, I've thought of all that," Talbot informed him, "and I figure we can pull it off without still getting to the bottom of the bank-roll. You know that old shack of a hotel that stands next door to our property? Well, it's been empty for a couple of seasons now, and it's for rent cheap. It looks pretty dilapidated from the front, you understand; but I was all over it the other day, thinking we might possibly find some use for the place, although I never then dreamed of this, and you'd be really surprised to see how well it has been kept in repair. A few hundred dollars and a little fresh paint would make the old joint as good as new, and there we'd be all fixed up with kitchen, storehouses, waiters' tables; in fact, all the arrangements for a first-class restaurant. Why, there's even ranges and sinks in there that go along with the building."

Accordingly, after some further little discussion, it was agreed that Talbot should go over that day and close up a lease on the abandoned hotel. Verily, their original project was branching out like Jonah's gourd; but, as they were still keeping within the limits of their capital, and as both of them were willing to risk all they had upon the success of their venture, neither of the partners felt inclined to call a halt.

"Do you know, Pettibone," Talbot chanced to observe two or three days later, while they were making a joint inspection of their new acquisition, "it's the funniest

thing? I can't get over the notion that at some time I have lived in this hotel."

"Is that so?" returned the artist abstractedly.

He was measuring the floor space in one of the rooms and, absorbed in his calculations, paid little heed to the other's remarks.

"Yes, sir; I seem to know every nook and cranny of it, just as I remember the house I used to live in as a boy. Why, the other day the agent tried to tell me that the attic was plastered, and although that was before I had been up to look at it, I knew just as well that he was wrong as I do at this minute.

"And this room we are in. Lord, I'd almost be willin' to take my oath that many's the night I have slept here, and many's the morning I've got up to that window to look out over the ocean. Yet I was never down to Stony Island for more than a day at a time in all my life, and I'm positive I never was inside of this hotel.

"Curious I should have such an idea about it, though," he mused. "Makes a fellow feel kind of spooky, eh, like maybe there was something in them reincarnation yarns you hear, after all? In that case," with a little laugh, "I wonder who I was when I stabled here?"

His half-earnest, half-jesting conjecture broke in upon Pettibone's computations and gave rise to a sudden suggestion in the latter's mind.

Why might it not be that this dim and elusive recollection was the first faint break in the clouds which veiled those lost six years? Why might it not be true that Talbot had really lodged here at some time during that forgotten period?

He said nothing of this, however, fearing that by overeagerness he might, as he had done before, frighten back the timid advances of the reawakening memory.

Instead, he bided his time, but as soon as he got an opportunity he sought out the agent from whom they had acquired the property and attempted to learn from him something of the hotel's history.

"Well, I don't know that I can tell you a great deal in regard to the old barracks," was the answer. "We have only had charge of it since Harry Freeman broke up trying to run it about two years ago. Freeman called it the 'Salt Meadows House,' but it had been under a number of other names before his time."

"What's that you're talking about?" broke in an old, gray-headed bookkeeper who had happened to catch something of the conversation. "The Salt Meadows House? Why, the man you should see about that is Harrison Gray. He built it and owned it for a number of years when it was running under the name of the Hotel Kingston."

"The Hotel Kingston?" exclaimed Pettibone. "Do you happen to recall any one who managed it when it was under that name?"

A sudden theory had flashed upon him, and his voice was almost tremulously eager as he put the question.

"No-o," pondered the man, "I can't say that I do. You see, proprietors come and go to these hotels down here on the island, and it's hard to say just who had charge of any one of them at a given time."

"Might it be possible," persisted the painter, "that a fellow named Max Eaglestone ever had this Hotel Kingston?"

The other shook his head.

"Not that I remember," he replied. "Of course, such might have been the case; but the name is one I don't seem to recognize. Go to Harrison Gray, though. He can tell you definitely all about the place and every one that ever ran it."

There was evidently nothing more to be learned at the real estate agent's, and Pettibone took his departure; but, as he walked along the street, his eyes were fixed and he took no note even of the direction in which he was heading. A great light had descended upon him, and at present all his faculties were centered upon adjusting himself to the new point of view thus unexpectedly gained.

Without conscious volition his steps led him to the pretty little seaside park which forms the eastern boundary of the island. It was a warm, sunny day for that time of year, with a mild, gentle breeze blowing in from the ocean, and Pettibone, perching himself atop a low stone wall, sat gazing out over the long rollers of the incoming tide as he pondered upon his problem.

What a shortsighted idiot he had been—chasing all over the country to investigate scores of Kingstons, when all the time his goal had been within half a dozen miles of home!

For, despite the real estate man's inability to recall the name, he had no doubt in his own mind that Eaglestone had been at one time the proprietor of the old tavern,

and that the legend on the torn envelope, if properly deciphered, would have read:

> If not delivered in five days, return to
> MAX EAGLESTONE,
> The Hotel Kingston,
> Stony Island, New York.

Did not everything point to such a solution? What other explanation could so satisfactorily account for Talbot's agitated utterance of the hated name long ago in the hospital, and his present hazy recollection of the old hotel as a place where he had once stopped?

The business of running such a place was one, moreover, in which Eaglestone might very readily have engaged, whereas the emphasis which Talbot had used in speaking his name on that single occasion might well indicate that the latter had been associated with him in the enterprise and had got the worst of the deal.

This was a theory likewise borne out by Mr. Gray's half recollection of Talbot's personality; for, if the medicine vender had been connected with Eaglestone in the management, the owner of the hotel might well remember having seen him about the place —even though he did not recall his name— and having been swindled or injured by one partner, would naturally class the other as being of the same stripe.

The artist's meditations were interrupted at this point, however, by a laughing greeting from behind, and he turned sharply about to see Marian Gray standing there with a gay-colored golf cape about her shoulders and a scarlet tam-o'-shanter set jauntily atop her dark curls.

She had been out for a stroll along the beach, she explained as, without waiting for an invitation, she clambered up and took a seat beside him on the low stone wall.

"It is such a glorious day, I simply couldn't stay in the house," she chattered on, "and this is always one of my favorite haunts. I think the beauty of sky and beach and sea here is enhanced by the immediate contrast with all that," waving her hand toward the straggling, unsightly area of "amusement palaces" and bath-houses which form the bulk of the island's environs.

"But you?" with a sudden glance at his overcast, brooding visage. "The day and the beauty hereabout seem to hold no charm for you. What has happened to disturb the even tenor of your thoughts, Sir Knight of the Rueful Countenance?"

Pettibone gave no answering smile to her playful challenge. The dark mission to which he had pledged himself seemed to lie as a shadow between them.

"Miss Gray," he said almost bruskly, "is your father at home? There is a matter of great importance on which I must consult him at once."

"But that will be impossible," she cried. "Did you not know? He sailed for Turkey this morning to see about some railroad concessions he has on foot over there, and he does not expect to return for four months.

"The original plan," she added, "was for us to go with him; but since the burning of the Nirvana mama has become so nervous in regard to traveling that the idea had to be given up, and he has started off alone."

Pettibone's heart gave a sudden leap. It would, he realized, be quite impossible to explain what he desired or receive the information he sought from Mr. Gray by letter. He must await the old gentleman's return and have a talk with him face to face.

Four months of freedom were then his. Four months in which he could do as he pleased, without having to give thought to this ugly duty which claimed him!

As if by magic his face cleared, and he walked back with Miss Gray across the sands as lighthearted and buoyant a cavalier as even she could have desired.

CHAPTER XI.

QUIESCENT REVENGE.

PREVENTED from any immediate resumption of the vengeful business imposed upon him by his "mission," Pettibone gave himself up wholly and uninterruptedly to the obligations of his profession and his partnership with Talbot.

It will show, however, how far he had drifted away from the considerations which had formerly ruled him when it is pointed out that he told himself that even though he were then able definitely to locate Eaglestone, he could not afford to try immediate conclusions with him.

"It would be unfair to Sam," he argued stoutly. "I have no right to jeopardize his

enterprise until it is somewhere near being upon its feet."

More and more the thought forced itself upon him that his father was dead, and that it would neither help his loved parents' memory, nor cause them to rest more quietly in their graves, to slay their betrayer; while he himself, still alive and with a future opening up before him, would be branded and discredited for the rest of his days.

Not that he had ever formulated all this in his mind, or would have admitted it for a single second, for he still believed himself as firmly determined as ever to exact a full expiation from Eaglestone; but nevertheless the leaven was at work, and the optimism of youth whispered to him that possibly with the present delay something might turn up which would render his bitter task unnecessary.

Accordingly, he thrust the dark shadow once more into the background and went lightheartedly on with his plans.

Talbot was also as busy as a beaver these days, and as the winter progressed his "ideas" continued to evolve with a startling force and frequency. Everything he saw, and everything of which he heard, suggested some new conception to be added to the glories of the Peplona enterprise.

Now it was the gorgeous nuptials of some Hindu maharaja of which he read in the newspapers, and which, taken in connection with the impending sale of a small circus out West, conjured up in his mind visions of a gorgeous Oriental spectacle.

Again, it would be a magazine article concerning the disastrous eruption of a volcano on some island in the southern seas, and he would hasten to consult with the artistic member of the firm to discover whether the catastrophe could not be reproduced in miniature.

Pettibone loyally followed his lead, working out the suggestions wherever practicable and encouraging Talbot to further efforts by his ingenious adaptations and ready acceptance of even the most fantastic of the latter's conceptions.

Of course, there were many things proposed which they had eventually to discard; but nevertheless the modest little plot of land which they had originally leased had already expanded into a frontage of several acres, and the buildings going up all over it gave it the semblance of a city in itself.

As their project grew and widened, they frequently found themselves cramped for funds. The bank-roll which they had brought with them was long since exhausted, and the money which Pettibone received for Miss Gray's portrait, together with that from two or three other orders he obtained on the strength of it, had speedily followed the same route.

Still the pair never faltered. Both were determined to see this thing through, and in one way or another the money was raised for each succeeding necessity.

True, Talbot's diamonds no longer flashed a herald of his coming, and both partners were destitute of watches, or, indeed, of any articles of value. Their credit was pledged to its furthest strain, and every cent they could beg or borrow from any source was risked upon the venture; but they were happy.

They could see rising before them now in actual material form the palaces of their dreams—had within themselves the proud realization of having achieved and conquered against all manner of obstacles and hindrances. And the future was bright with glowing hope. What more can a man ask in this world of sorrow and disappointment?

Still both of them well knew that they could not yet afford to fold their hands. The opening of the season was fast approaching, and there was still a multitude of things to be done.

With tireless energy Pettibone labored away in his workshop, painting great rolls of canvas which were to represent the fronts of temples, the interiors of gorgeous mansions, the depths of shady forests. He had six men assisting him now, but even so he was still sadly behindhand.

With equal indefatigability was Talbot engaged upon the grounds. He coaxed and bullied and cajoled his employees so scientifically that it almost seemed as though he got two days' work for one out of every man jack of them. And as for himself, he had apparently solved the problem of being in half a dozen places at once.

There was one point, however, which troubled both partners sorely, and that was the natural lack of coherence which showed in the place.

Their "ideas" having come singly, and having been added haphazard to the original conception, there was no governing uniformity in the arrangement of details.

This was annoying to Pettibone solely on esthetic grounds, but with Talbot there was a different principle at stake.

"This concern's been got up to advance the interests of Peplona," he would grumble, "and yet there ain't no name we can give to it that will interduce the idea. In the first place, of course, we'd agreed to call it the 'Peplona Forest,' but that certainly ain't going to cover baby incubators and stupendous spectacles and a grand congress of all the mysterious peoples of the globe. I don't know any fit title we could frame up for it, unless it'd be 'Boarding-House Hash.'"

"Yes, or the 'Crazy Quilt,'" assented Pettibone gloomily.

Marian Gray chanced to be in the studio when this conversation took place. She had become deeply interested in the enterprise while she was sitting for her portrait, and since then had often dropped in with her mother or some other chaperon to learn how things were progressing.

She had been idly amusing herself by moving the little pasteboard models of the various buildings about, trying thus to gain an idea of what the place would look like when finished—a sort of bird's-eye view, so to speak, of the whole situation.

She glanced up with a quick inspiration as she heard the two men lamenting their inability to find a suitable name.

"Why don't you call it a park?" she cried. "That is what it looks like—a lovely park, with its lagoons and its streams and its woodland and its gay buildings."

Pettibone clapped his hands.

"Good," he exclaimed. "It's a park. We'll call it Sylvan Park, or Indian Park, or some such name, won't we, Talbot?"

"Not much we won't," asserted the medicine man with definite finality. "The park idea is all right—it's a great scheme. But when we come to stick a name in front of it, there's only one that's got any right to go there. In these days of grandeur, my boy, don't let us forget the corner-stone upon which we have built this imposing edifice.

"We'll call it," he announced, "we'll call it 'Peplona Park'!"

CHAPTER XII.

FROM SUNLIGHT TO SHADOW.

PETTIBONE walked home with Marian Gray. It was a lovely evening in April, with a warm touch of spring in the air, and unconsciously their footsteps lagged as they strolled along.

During the winter the two young people had seen a good deal of each other in one way or another, and many were the walks they had taken in company.

But none of them had ever seemed to Pettibone so delightful as this one with the world budding out anew into a tender green, and the leaves beginning to uncurl upon the branches lately so bare and dead.

The setting sun cast its slanting rays across the broad avenue along which they sauntered, and out beyond a little park extending to the water's edge they could catch a glimpse of the bay, now transformed into a flood of rippling gold.

A soft, languorous breeze stirred about their temples, and a blossoming cherry-tree under which they were passing shook down upon them a snow of perfumed petals.

The artist and the girl talked, of course, as they loitered along; commented in quite matter-of-fact fashion, indeed, upon the beauty of the evening; discussed prosaically the affairs of every-day life; even had a spirited argument on the subject of various things to eat; but, pshaw, as a great diplomat once said, words were only invented to conceal feelings.

It was the sense of nearness and of comradeship which acted on their spirits like wine, and transformed their most commonplace utterances into poetry. The perfume of her hair came to him in little gusts of delicate fragrance; the firm clasp of his hand as he guided her around some little excavation in the sidewalk, set her heart to beating in tumultuous rhythm.

They paused a space at her gate, each loath to end so idyllic an occasion, yet shy, timid of each other, tongue-tied.

It was the girl who finally broke a silence which threatened to become embarrassing.

"We are all very much excited and torn up here, or I would ask you in to dinner," she said, speaking rapidly and endeavoring to appear at ease. "You know papa is coming home to-morrow, and mama has made that the excuse for a general housecleaning."

From Olympus to Hades! No, Pettibone had not known that her father was coming home on the morrow—had not even been aware that he had yet started on his return to this country.

Harrison Gray, it seems, had not achieved the immediate success he had anticipated in regard to his concession, and his stay in Turkey had consequently been extended from

time to time, so that Pettibone had finally ceased to ask concerning his home-coming, and Marian, ignorant of the young man's interest, had neglected to mention the fact when her father actually did set sail.

Now the painter was stunned, paralyzed by the unexpectedness of the blow. In a moment all the soft beauty of the April evening was blotted out for him. He was once more face to face with the old grim problem.

"Your father coming home to-morrow?" he repeated, half hoping that he had not heard aright.

And then as she confirmed the statement his face settled into moody, haggard lines.

The sun had set, and a cold wind blew between them. The girl shivered involuntarily and extended her hand in farewell. Pettibone merely touched it. Then, turning with a curt good night, drew his hat down over his eyes and strode off into the gathering darkness.

Marian gazed after him a moment with a pained, puzzled expression in her eyes. Then, breathing a little sigh, she turned from the gate and walked slowly up toward the house.

Pettibone had little sleep that night. All through the long hours he fought out the battle with himself, for he no longer was able to disguise the issue.

On the one side love, life, happiness were beckoning to him; while on the other stood a gaunt and grisly specter which he mistakenly perhaps called duty.

It was a bitter and relentless contest. But the painter came of a stock which in its time had gone willingly to prison, to the scaffold, and to the stake for the sake of principle, and in the end the sterner alternative prevailed.

He would remain true to his vow, he resolved, no matter what the sacrifice entailed.

Accordingly, as soon as opportunity offered, he sought an audience with Harrison Gray, and unfalteringly propounded to him the questions which might, and, as Pettibone believed, would doom him to forsake this pleasant existence, and do that which would set him apart from other men with the mark of Cain upon his brow.

Mr. Gray received him cordially, even effusively.

"Why, my dear Pettibone," he said, shaking hands warmly, "I am glad to see you again and to have a chance to compliment you on the wonderful portrait you have given us of our little girl. Sit down and tell me how everything is going with you. I have already heard something from Marian of the marvelous way in which you have broadened and extended the amusement idea on which you were engaged, and I am all curiosity in regard to it."

Pettibone, however, remained standing. He had grown very pale, now that the crisis was upon him, but his eyes were steady and his lips firm.

"Mr. Gray," he said in a low voice, but clearly and distinctly, "I want first to ask you a few questions, if you please. I trust you will not deem me impertinent, but there are certain matters which I must know, and you are the only person who can tell me."

"Why, certainly," responded the old man without hesitation, although manifestly surprised at the tone of the other's address. "Anything I can conscientiously tell you, Mr. Pettibone, I shall be very glad to tell."

There was a subtle change in his attitude, a suggestion of that quick, cautious reserve displayed by men of large affairs when they suspect they are about to be placed in the witness-box; but, mindful of the obligation under which he lay to Pettibone, the old man's air was still friendly.

"Then," said the artist, "I want you to tell me if you know the present whereabouts of Max Eaglestone?"

Gray gave a perceptible start, then glanced sharply, questioningly into the face of his visitor.

"Why do you ask me that?" he demanded.

He kept studying the countenance of the younger man from under his bushy brows with a half convinced, half cynical, smile upon his lips.

Moreover, his palpable evasion of a direct answer satisfied Pettibone that he did know just where Eaglestone was to be found; and, although that was what he had come to find out, the fellow's heart sank at the realization as though it were weighted with lead.

He had hoped in a way that this interview with Gray might really amount to nothing after all—that the latter's connection with Eaglestone might have been so long since, or of such comparatively slight importance, that the magnate had lost track of him as thoroughly as he himself had.

But with Gray's answer, any such hopes fled. If anything was to be gleaned from the millionaire's manner, it was that the search was at an end.

"Why do you think that I might have any knowledge concerning Max Eaglestone, Mr. Pettibone?" repeated the old gentleman.

"Did you not own the Hotel Kingston at one time?"

"Yes."

"And Eaglestone rented from you, did he not?"

"No," with some asperity. "He persuaded me into running it myself, with him as manager; and then, when he had thoroughly cleaned out the place and raised all the money he could on it, skipped out, leaving me to hold the bag.

"It was the only time that any one ever got the best of me on a business deal, Mr. Pettibone; and, although it was relatively only a small matter, I felt particularly bitter over it, because the fellow had come to me with a hard-luck story and had aroused my sympathy. I really only consented to the arrangement to help him out; and when he showed such base ingratitude, I swore that he should be landed behind the bars for it if it was the last act I ever did. I suppose I have spent, first and last, nearly ten thousand dollars trying to trace him."

"But if you know where he is at present why have you not had him arrested?" exclaimed Bob.

"Why — er" — the old man hesitated — "there have arisen reasons which made it seem unwise. In fact, I have finally decided to let him go free, little as he deserves it."

"Well, I will never let him go free," declared Pettibone vengefully, "if I am ever able to locate him."

"Ah?" Gray leaned forward with an interested air. "And what is your grievance against Max Eaglestone?"

"He ruined and destroyed my father," answered Pettibone with curt bitterness. "It is owing to him that I am to-day an orphan."

Gray started up from his chair with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Then you must be the son of Robert Pettibone, formerly of Brooklyn," he cried. "I knew something of that sad case; and if justice ever went awry in this country, his was undoubtedly the instance. And do you mean to tell me that Eaglestone was also the scoundrel behind his disasters?"

Pettibone merely nodded. He was so wrought up by the recollection of his father's wrongs that he could not trust himself to speak.

"You have indeed a deeper cause for enmity against this man than I have," muttered Harrison Gray. "And to think that all this time I have been shielding and protecting the scamp solely on your account! Do you mean to tell me that you have never known—never suspected—"

Pettibone's eyes grew wide with a sudden horror. His stiff lips could scarcely frame the question.

"Who?" he almost gasped.

"Why, your partner, Talbot, of course. He is Max Eaglestone. I recognized him the moment I saw his portrait!"

(To be continued.)

Hunting a Manager.

BY GRIFFIN BARRY.

To Capture and Tame Such a Beast It Is Advisable To Put on Gum-Shoes and Wear a Mask.

MARTIN WARE, a dramatic critic whose right sleeve was worn thin from much friction with a writing-pad, sat in his office gazing at a certain drawer in his desk. It was *the* drawer.

Round it lay piles of the waste of his daily toil—crumpled and scrawled and pasted white paper; paper beside, beneath, and above him; blank, penciled, and printed paper; all of it by-product in the manufacture of the various daily columns Martin Ware edited on the Chicago *Evening Mail,*

and none of it worth in his eyes the flare of a penny candle beside the contents of *the* drawer.

It was early in the evening, and the electric light with the green shade, which was never turned on until Ware's back was bent to work, was newly lit. He unlocked the receptacle and surveyed the contents—seven typewritten, carefully bound manuscripts, the work of half the evenings in seven laborious years. Neatly and lovingly they were piled in one corner.

In the other was the first act in pencil of Ware's eighth play.

Usually, Ware began work without any pauses. But to-night he moped, and his hands were idle.

His mind insisted on going back over the results of his work, or the lack of them; and in that spirit he never got anything done. After half an hour of vain effort to shake off his mood, he threw his head back and gave in.

There was no escaping the truth—somehow his plays did remain in neat and loving order in his own desk. Their rest used to be broken frequently by quick little trips to the managers—quick trips and speedy returns. Often, Ware believed, they did no more than glance at the name of their natural enemy, the dramatic critic, under the title of a play before pasting his return postage on the self-addressed envelope and gently but firmly dropping it in the mail-box.

A year ago he had given up even sending his plays away to be read. Tucking away sundry dark disappointments where they upset his peace of mind only occasionally, he thenceforth submitted his work to a fastidious jury of two, of which one was himself.

The other jury member was absent at the moment, and the only sign of her lay in *the* drawer. It was a fountain-pen with a gold circlet on which was engraved in tiny letters:

TO THE PLAYWRITER
FROM HIS READER.

The instrument was always in use when Martin worked, and at other times locked away. He found it on his desk one morning five years before, shortly after he had read the fragment of a play to the tall, blue-eyed girl across the hall who interviewed celebritles for the *Mail.*

Martha Barton had shed a few tears over the quiet, deep pathos of the drama, but not before Martin. At that time she knew him only slightly. But the rumor that she had wept leaked out through a woman companion, and presently the fact that Ware had written a genuine dramatic "tear-puller" grew into an office sensation. A dozen willing listeners offered themselves to him. But Martin kept silence until he was able to go to Martha with the finished play.

After that reading, Martin needed no other audience. He had found his goal. By the time another play was written Martha admitted that she had found hers also. Not much later Martin set up his fastidious jury of two—and forgot the managers, or tried to.

His musing was cut short by a shadow which fell across his writing-pad. He raised his head from *the* drawer to look into Martha's eyes. She threw aside her furs and took his hand.

"Martin," she said, "I'm worried. I'm worried enough to leave my grate-fire and come down here to worry you, too."

He looked at her dubiously. And guessing that his thoughts had been not far away from her own, Martha plunged headlong into the subject that both of them usually avoided.

"I've been thinking," she said, "that our jury of two ought either to resign or change its policy. Its sin is that it has been ignoring the public of late. You know that we agreed in the beginning not to do that; only to ignore the managers. And even the managers—do you know, I almost think they could be reached if—"

"One moment, dear," Martin interrupted. "You've found me out. For a year I confess I've been doing exactly that—writing plays for yourself and myself. I've come to think that we are the best audience there is."

Martha stared at him sadly. Martin looked at the opposite cornice with weariness and went on:

"I've trudged the town with my wares until I could find my way to the managers' offices in the dark. And the years were many enough before I found I was only wasting shoe leather.

"I remember how I used to face a manager with the story of the play on my lips. He would glance at my card first, with

"Martin Ware" boldly printed on it, and then look again at the Chicago *Evening Mail* in finer type below. Then he would eye me up and down to see what kind of a critter I was.

"In the eyes of every one of them, I saw 'Down with the Critics' written out as plain as posters on a bill-board, and I used to interview about two-thirds of the managers in the country during one trip East.

"None of them had ever seen me before, and a few tried to like me in spite of my profession, in which I remember one told me with a grin I was no worse than any other. But the idea that a man who could criticize their offerings with one hand could with the other write plays that any one would come to see—well, you should have seen them laugh in their sleeves at the notion.

"It was as regular as clockwork. Of course, they didn't smile openly; you may be sure that they were all polite to the dramatic critic of the Chicago *Evening Mail*, but—"

"Wait!" cried the girl. "I can't stand hearing of such stupidity a moment longer! And if there's such a thing as being too forgiving, Martin, you're it. I'm going to teach you something about revenge."

He rolled his eyes in mock horror at the big, red word; but nothing stopped her.

"You must make those managers *see* that the task of getting a worth-while play past them is an outrageous farce. Put it all into a play, for instance, and make it cut. Let 'em hate you, honey! They ought to know that if your pen can't tickle, anyhow it can jab."

Martin looked only mildly interested, but Martha went bravely on.

"See if you can't make something out of this. Write three acts round a young dramatist with a drawerful of plays worth their weight in gold to any producer with the courage of a mouse. (That's your own autobiography, dear.)

"And let him bombard a manager with his masterpieces—a cold, hard manager, one whose outlook on life is as wide as the mouth of his purse and no wider. Then put a hungry play-broker or two into the background of the plot, to give it Broadway local color, and—and—"

Martha stopped a second for want of breath and also, it must be confessed, for want of plot; but Martin had been awakened by this time and he caught her up.

"And for a heroine I've got a life-size model before my eyes!" he cried. "I'll have to make her as good as an angel and as clever as Satan to have her true to life. I'll just love to write that part!

"We'll end the first act by having the low-brow manager buy the high-brow author a dinner in order to worm out of him his despised ideas without paying more for them than the price of a dinner. Then—let me see—assemble all the characters, including the 'Friend-Who-Could-Write-a-Masterpiece-if-He-Only-Wanted-to' kind, and—"

By this time Martin was busy with paper and pencil sketching out the scenario of a farce. Some time later, when it was roughly jotted down, he looked up with a beaming face.

"This is worth working on," he cried. "Of course it will make every manager in the country hate me like the plague. We're simply muck-raking their whole rotten system, Martha. They'll want to hunt me out of the country. And it's going to give me more satisfaction than anything I've done yet."

Martha closed her wise blue eyes at this proof of her powers of suggestion over the boyish genius before her.

"Of course it is going to be the best thing you've done," she said. "After they read it, the managers will wonder who you are, anyhow! But how can we be sure that all the heads of the business read it? No one gets to them without a good introduction. You had better take one at a time, so as not to scatter your ammunition. Let me see."

She paused and Martin waited. Presently she clapped her hands and cried: "I've got it! Here's an idea so good that it fairly makes my head ache. Listen."

And she talked steadily to him for fifteen minutes, like an elder sister trying to show a talented little boy how to make his fortune. At the end of that time Martin bent on one knee and put her fingers to his lips.

"I kiss the hand," he said, hiding his profound admiration under comic opera manners.

Then he took her home.

II.

It was the busiest day in the busiest month on that surging portion of Broadway given over to the theatrical business.

Old actors and new actors, would-be actors and has-beens—all of them hopeful and pushing and all of them fighting in their hearts the fear of a jobless future—gossiped on the corners and tramped in and out of the managers' offices.

Only the rank and file of the profession were to be seen. The lucky superior ones whose services had been secured by contract months before were in the country or had fled to Europe to wallow in the luxury of a complete rest before the mad labor of another season fell upon them.

Once in a long while a well-known star would step out of a motor-car or, very rarely indeed, march through the community on foot, bowing right and left to acquaintances. Then the sidewalks buzzed.

Before a score of doors which did not even need signs, so well-thumbed were the lintels and so worn the approaches, the hum rose and fell from noon to midnight.

Up-stairs behind many crowded anterooms sat the managers, shuffling the cards of chance for the mob in the street below and for an entertainment-loving public that yearly lined their pockets—and some said their hearts—with gold.

In the halls leading to one office the commotion raged especially high that year, although the door-posts down-stairs were freshly painted and the flags in the pavement comparatively unsoiled. A new manager had reached Broadway, armed with a million or two made from the cheaper melodramas.

He was investing now in plays written for people who could pay two dollars a seat, instead of one-fourth that sum. Only a few hundred thousand had been spent, and already Charles Bradley's attractions were bringing him back his money. They dotted the land; three at that moment shone on Broadway.

Hence his long tier of offices, crowded at one end with anxious stagelings who flittered and buzzed toward Bradley's own "throne-room" at the opposite end like a timid flock of bees.

One hot afternoon a young man entered this turmoil, bearing a card.

A red-headed office-boy at the outer gate kept him waiting half an hour, at length disappearing with the pasteboard into the maze of rooms beyond. Another thirty minutes passed and he suddenly returned, neither looking at nor uttering a word to the stranger.

Addressed, he muttered something over his shoulder that the young man could not catch. Pressed, he produced the card and murmured that Mr. Bradley was not in.

The newcomer persistently and silently held his ground. In two minutes the boy was again out of sight, and the young man simply walked past his stronghold into the next room.

It was a large bare audience chamber containing nothing but tired and worried persons sitting on camp-chairs. The man strode through the center of the gathering to the opposite door, trying not to notice the envious eyes that followed him.

He reached a small hall opening into smaller halls and stood confused before a dozen or more glass doors, none of them lettered and several open, revealing busy people in small square offices.

Here no one paid him the least attention, although twenty preoccupied people scurried past him. He wandered about, hoping to find "Mr. Bradley" painted on some remote glazed door. Once he nearly asked for Bradley of a clerklike individual who looked kind, but the query froze on his lips as he realized that he might easily be shown the outer door and lose the ground he had gained.

At length the explorer took his courage in his two hands and walked brazenly through a small door that appeared on his right at that moment in his voyage. He told himself that he might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb. Theatrical offices are no places for lambs.

At the threshold he remembered — and put on, as he would an overcoat — the haughty, grand manner he had planned to use and then forgotten in his sympathy for the depressing heel-coolers that filled the outer offices.

"Mr. Bradley?"

His only faintly courteous voice seemed to take it for granted that Bradleys were as thick as fly-specks in that office and of much the same importance. Also, that unless a Bradley were shown him forthwith, he must be off about weightier business.

A round, red, and nervous little man opened his mouth to swear.

"Da—a—!" he said, and then thought better of it. He changed to "What in the devil do you want?"

Then he fussed among the papers on his desk, and seemed mortified at his own rudeness. Evidently it was on his mind to be

pleasant, but he never could be sure of what he was going to say.

Before he could concentrate on a plan of conduct his caller caught sight of an envelope on the desk addressed to Charles Bradley, and knew that by good luck he had cornered his man. The young man drew out a card. It was held so near his nose-glasses that before the visitor could be ordered out of the office Mr. Bradley had read the printing.

There was "Martin Ware" printed in large type. The name meant nothing to him; he was no reader of the newspapers. In finer type below: "*Dramatic Editor, Chicago Evening Mail.*" Mr. Bradley knew the theatrical business, and this certainly meant a great deal. And written in ink above the printing: "Introducing Mr. John Robinson to Mr. Charles Bradley." Considering the information in fine type, this meant something also.

Mr. Bradley looked up at the composed features of Mr. Robinson and, having decided on courtesy, asked him to sit down. Instead, Mr. Robinson drew from his pocket a manuscript and laid it on the desk.

"Here, Mr. Bradley," he announced in his best manner, "is a play on which I've spent many months. You will know the locality in which the scenes are laid, and you may even recognize the characters.

"It contains the sum total of ten years of experience in writing for the stage. Even Martin Ware, the ruthless dramatic critic, tells me that the play fills a long-felt want. And you know what a terror in his judgment he is. Also—"

It could be seen that the young man was delivering a little set speech, all of which seemed to fall dead on the expressionless mask which was Mr. Bradley's face until the dramatic critic was mentioned. Then the manager stirred and waved a protesting hand.

"Ah, Mr. Robinson," he said ceremoniously, "I cannot listen to anything against the dramatic critics. In this office we believe in making friends with them. I want the critics to feel at home here. Please give Mr. Ware my regards.

"I don't know him; but give 'em, anyway. Ask him to come in and have lunch with me the next time he is in New York. And, since you come from Mr. Ware, I think I'll read your play myself. Please let Mr. Ware know that."

With a fartherly air, the manager dismissed Mr. Robinson, putting the manuscript in a place of its own at the side of his desk. Concealing behind his hat a smirk of disgust, but glancing with satisfaction at the delivered play, the caller walked out through the crowded offices.

That night in his hotel the same young man addressed the following telegram to Martha Barton, *Evening Mail*, Chicago:

> Bomb is delivered. Bradley himself will read play on Ware's introduction. Himself, mind you. Longed to tell him it was Ware's play and Ware who called, but refrained. Time enough when we hear from him. I expect libel suit.
>
> Lord love him for a foxy old diplomat, however. Gave me tremendous palaver about his undying affection for all dramatic critics, especially M. Ware. It's a funny world. Love. Home to-morrow. MARTIN.

Then Mr. Ware asked the room clerk for his key, and went up-stairs to bed.

III.

MARTIN again bent under the green light, working furiously on a new play. His trip to New York had given him double zest.

"Getting the laugh on old Bradley," he remarked to Martha, "has been the most efficient awakener I ever had. Now, I actually want to write something that he'll like. After making a howl about their whole dodgasted system, I'd like to show them all that I can use something else than the muck-rake."

The new play was a brilliant little comedy that even Martha, his sternest critic, admitted was the best work he had ever done. He had thrown overboard all desires except to make the public laugh, and the result was beginning to convince him that if he had done nothing else year after year he might be living on his royalties at that moment — even taking into account the managers.

"If I had followed a different line, there's a possibility that my name might have been in electric lights—well, say five years ago," he said to Martha quizzically. "That was the year I met you. Then you could have had purple and fine linen all along."

She knew he was asking her if she had any secret rebellion at the lack of purple and fine linen. The girl glanced down at her long, slender fingers, calloused and a bit misshapen from years of pounding an ancient *Evening Mail* typewriter. She

knew her mind perfectly, and in a moment met his eyes bravely and frankly.

"They'll be all the more previous when they do come," she said. He looked his thanks for the words, and went on with his work.

Another week passed, and still Bradley was as dumb as an oyster and doubtless gathering wrath, while the pair in Chicago slowly, line by line, built up the new play which was to prove to all Broadway that not every dramatic critic is a cipher at the play-writing trade.

Then one hot August afternoon, while Martha was pounding out copy in her small, box-like office a telegram was laid on her desk. She tore it open hurriedly, so as to get back to her afternoon story, for which a boy waited at her elbow.

At the first word she picked up the envelope to reread the address.

It was directed to "John Robinson, care of Martin Ware."

In two seconds she had devoured the entire message, word for word. Martha swallowed something in her throat, arose, and walked across the hall to Martin's door.

He said she looked as if she had seen a miracle, but he was mistaken. Not until afterward did he notice that there was merely calm triumph in her eyes.

But what she held in her hand was a miracle for him:

> Your farce "Hunting the Playwright" is delightful. Can we arrange terms at once? Would like to advertise it as satire on old-fashioned methods in theatrical business. Bradley & Co. congratulates itself on modern attitude toward original talent. Will reach Chicago Monday, bringing contract for your inspection.
>
> C. BRADLEY.

IV.

"BUT, Martha," said the jubilant young dramatist two hours later as they were dining in a restaurant, "Martha—why so calm? Do you know that you act as if you had been expecting this all along?"

And, remembering the nights she had lain awake planning out the entire scheme and the campaign of suggestions by which she had prompted Martin to carry it through, Martha nodded her wise head toward her *fiancé* and remarked sweetly that she had.

THRUSH SONG.

HARK to the song of the thrush,
At the fall of the dusk and dew;
Piercing the twilight hush,
Thrilling it through and through!
While the first stars twinkle, twinkle,
And the little leaves crinkle, crinkle,
Low as a rill,
Clear as a bell,
Down from the hill,
Up from the dell,
And all for me and you!

List to the song of the thrush,
From the shadows cool and deep,
From the heart of the underbrush
Where the pixy people creep!
While the winds grow crisper, crisper,
And the little leaves whisper, whisper,
Fine as a flute
Blown at the morn,
Soft as a lute
Of fairy horn,
A call to the land of sleep!

Sennett Stephens.

Four to Support.*

BY ROBERT CARLTON BROWN,
Author of "Honors Heaped High," etc.

Dire Happenings to a Group of Americans Who Undertook to Make a Living in London.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

BILL BREWER, illustrator, and Bob Snarlton, "ad. writer," both Americans, and both engaged to be married, are in London. Fired by youthful enthusiasm for their ability to make a living, they cable to their *fiancées* to come over and be married, telling them that they will set up a double household. The girls agree to come. Before they arrive, Brewer injures his drawing hand very badly, so that he is thrown out of work. They have taken a house in West Kensington, which at one time had belonged to a doctor. That night there is a frantic ringing of the bell, and a tiny waif, ill and half-frozen, tumbles in. To revive him, Snarlton gives him a good-sized dose of whisky, whereupon he grows worse, and the two young men find that they have given him, by mistake, a powerful drug. Snarlton rushes out to get a police officer, who, when told of the situation, says that Snarlton is liable to be held for murder, if the boy dies, or administering medicine without a license, if he lives.

Snarlton is held in five hundred dollars bail—the money he borrows from a well-to-do friend, Hapgood—and unless the boy happens to die, it may be that he will not get into trouble, though after all he may have to serve a prison-term. The girls arrive shortly after. They find Brewer very ill in the care of a doctor, Snarlton out of a job and in the shadow of jail. Things go from bad to worse. Hapgood is unable to lend them any more money and they are continually, through ignorance, falling foul of the law.

When Snarlton's trial comes, to the utter consternation of every one he is found guilty and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Added to this new misery comes a relapse on Brewer's part and the necessity for an operation. The five hundred dollars given for Snarlton's bail is happily returned to them—the only alleviating feature in their predicament. After a period of tension, Brewer goes through with the operation and comes out all right. The waif who caused them so much trouble comes to them and begs a home, and they, thinking that he may possibly be of some assistance to them, take him in.

Their circumstances do not improve and at last in order to escape eviction from their house, they pack up and move to cheaper lodgings which they can get by the week. There Brewer conceives the idea of modeling little figures after the fashion of Billikin, a mascot, hitherto unknown in England; and Lillian Snarlton, who has done some modeling, makes a number of them, as a forlorn hope. Mrs. Brewer goes out to sell them, and when she comes back it is with the good news that she has sold all that have been made and received orders for more. Suddenly on their track appears the agent from whom they rented the house. They, however, claim that Snarlton, who is still in jail, is alone responsible; still being continually bothered by him, they hunt up even cheaper apartments and hiring a cab, attempt to leave their present lodgings, but are halted at the door by the agent and his minions.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ALL HOPES THWARTED.

"WHAT'S the matter!" cried Brewer, as he tried to throw off the fellow who had grabbed him by his well arm.

"Don't struggle!" his wife cried. "You'll hurt your arm."

"It's the agent!" put in Lillian, in an excited tone, as she recognized the man who had thwarted their plans.

"Yes, didn't you expect me?" smiled the man.

"What do you think you are going to do now?" cried Brewer hotly, as he recognized the fellow.

"I was afraid you people might take the notion into your heads to leave these

* This story began in The Cavalier for December, 1910.

rooms. I just wanted to let you know that I was here and to tell you that I think it would be very wise if you would stay right where you are.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but I think you will agree with me that you might just as well stay here as to go somewhere else. I'm afraid you'll find it rather hard to lose me."

The little group was thrown into utter consternation. They had not expected any such disagreeable happening.

Brewer stood undecided for several moments. Then he turned to the man and said:

"Come up into the rooms for a minute and we'll talk it over."

"With pleasure," smiled the agent. "But first I think it will be wise for you to dismiss the cab. Then I will call off these two men I hired to watch your place this evening."

Brewer knew from the man's tone that he had divined his own purpose in asking him to go up to the room. It seemed that there was no chance to outwit the agent.

"All right," agreed Brewer, stepping over and giving the cabman a sixpence for his trouble in waiting.

Then they all returned to the rooms and talked things over. The agent explained his purpose so carefully that there could be no doubt that he would follow them wherever they went. It was therefore decided that the best thing to do was to remain in the room and not make another attempt to move.

After they had agreed to this the agent left, and the little group sat up for some time talking over their chances. It was a bit of hard luck they had not figured upon and it struck them all in a heap.

"I'm afraid we'll never get this thing settled until we pay that four months' rent in full," said Brewer. "That agent seems to be a very determined man. It certainly wouldn't do any good to move elsewhere. I guess it is up to us to stay here."

"I've got an idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Brewer. "We're doing a good business now; why don't we move back into the West Kensington house?"

"And pay two weeks' rent for nothing!" cried Lillian. "I should say not!"

"But we won't lose much at that rate," insisted Mrs. Brewer, who showed signs of having worried over the thing much more than the others did. "We've paid only six dollars a week in these rooms, and we might better lose that than the whole two hundred and fifty which we may have to pay when Bob gets out of jail."

"It isn't a bad idea," agreed her husband.

"But think of how humiliating it would be," insisted Lillian, who had taken a strong stand against the agent all the way through.

"But it will be a whole lot easier for us to eat humble pie for a while than pay out two hundred and fifty dollars," said Brewer.

They could reach no decision that night, so were forced to unpack their belongings and go to bed in the rooms which they had expected never to see again.

In the morning the little household soon forgot its troubles in work. Brewer's condition had bettered so that he was able to help them a little in turning out the images. To be sure, his assistance did not amount to much, but it kept him contented to know that he was doing something.

That afternoon was a visiting day at the prison, and Lillian went to see Bob. She recounted the whole thing to him at great length, and asked what he thought concerning their moving back into the West Kensington house.

"Have you got enough money to pay a month's rent?" was his first question.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then I think you had better do it. I've got a great respect for the laws in this country since I have stumbled up against them so frequently. I don't think we can afford to run any chances.

"You say this Billikin business is getting along so well that you're sure of a good income? Don't you think that the best idea would be to be sure of the future at the expense of a little present discomfort?"

When it was put to her in this light Lillian began to see that it would probably be the best course. So when she returned home that night she told them what Bob had said, and they finally came to the decision that it would be best to return at once.

Dr. Hill came in and they told him of their resolution. He was quite happy over the fact, and said he would arrange with the agents at once. They gave him the money, and went to bed quite contented with their decision.

It was a great relief to all of them to feel that they would not be troubled any further by the inexorable agent.

CHAPTER LIX.

HOME AGAIN.

SO they moved out first thing in the morning and went back to the West Kensington house. The agent was there to greet them, and his manner had changed completely. They found him quite affable and polite. They had learned that it is an English characteristic to fawn when there is money to be made out of it and to be overbearing to the man from whom they could make nothing.

"It really does seem good to get back home again," said Lillian, when they were alone and Jimmie had come in from the East Side, where he had been sent to bring back the stuff which they had intended to leave at the new rooms they had secured the day before.

"Yes," said Brewer. "I'm mighty glad to be back here feeling so well. If our good luck keeps up I'll be a well man in two or three weeks, and then we'll manage this business to the queen's taste."

The girls agreed with him, but they knew that it would be almost two months before Brewer's arm would be healed so that he could do his usual work.

"I think we had better go out and get those two or three people that I spoke of to help work on the images," said Lillian, with a smile, as she realized that at least one of their wild fancies had come true.

"Isn't it wonderful!" enthused Mrs. Brewer. "It's been less than two weeks that we've worked with these things, and already they have been proved an established success."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," agreed Lillian enthusiastically.

"That's always the way with a good thing," commented Brewer. "If it amounts to anything at all it is usually such a big success that it is hard to realize. I shouldn't wonder if we could make enough money out of the images to pay off the doctor's bill and everything before Snarlton gets out of jail."

"Wouldn't that be great!" cried Lillian, happy over the idea that she had stayed and fought the thing out.

It seemed to her that their troubles were coming to a close; as a matter of fact, they had only begun.

Lillian went out that afternoon and secured two young men to help her with the work. It was a great relief to know that they would have money enough to pay for help and still make a good income.

During the following two or three days Mrs. Brewer took many orders for the images. Their sale did not suffer from the introduction of the American Billikins, as they had feared.

Bob became quite excited over the idea, and it made him much more contented than he had been at any time since being cooped up in the small cell.

Lillian had taken one of the idols to him the very first thing, and he was allowed to keep it in his cell, where he sat and contemplated the thing whenever he felt moody and despondent.

He saw great advertising possibilities in it, and itched to get out where he could be free to work on the ideas that came to him.

Meantime the people at the West Kensington house were busily turning out the images by the dozen. They had four men at work and their profits steadily increased. Ten days after they had returned they were making twenty dollars a day.

"If things keep on this way," said Brewer, "we'll be owning London before we get through."

"It can't keep on like this," said Lillian. "It's too good to last."

She made the remark lightly, little knowing how true it would be.

That very afternoon a man came to the door and asked for an interview with the makers of the idols similar to Billikin.

Lillian was pleased to talk with him and tell him all she could. At first they all thought he was a reporter, but when Brewer asked him if that was not the case he answered "No!" abruptly, and afterward qualified it by saying that he was connected with a magazine.

This change in his statement seemed strange to them, and they were inclined to be nervous all through the remainder of his visit. At first the hope of having an article written about their work, which would mean free advertising to them, had made them talk too freely.

As soon as the man denied being a reporter and then tried to make them think he was, all three became anxious concerning his visit.

He had an air of mystery, was very English in his ways, and his sharp eyes took in every detail of whatever they encountered. His questioning was very close, almost personal, and at length Brewer resented it.

"Will you kindly tell me the purpose of your visit?" he asked sharply.

The man looked up and smiled. Then he answered in a low tone:

"No, I don't care to tell you now. You will hear very shortly, however. Just be patient."

Something in his manner of saying it made them anticipate trouble. How they wished they had been more guarded in talking to him. But it was too late to mend matters.

"As I have learned all that I came to find out," said the visitor suddenly, "I think I shall bid you good day. Don't forget. You'll hear more from me, and while it may not be to your liking, remember that you have brought it on yourselves."

He left abruptly, and the little trio sat silent for some time, oppressed by his strange threat. What could it mean? What had they done?

Everything had been going along so nicely that they feared something sudden like this which would bring back all the old hard luck. They talked for some time, trying to get over the notion that some new trouble was in store for them. But it would not down.

Suddenly there came a ring at the door.

All three crept to a front window and looked out.

There stood two policemen on the door-step, and between them was the man who had been questioning them so closely.

CHAPTER LX.

A CRIMINAL INFRINGEMENT.

"WHAT shall we do?" cried Lillian, going all to pieces at the sight of the two policemen waiting on the door-step.

"I suppose it would be useless to resist them," put in Mrs. Brewer. "We have done nothing. Why should we feel like criminals?"

"Anne's right," answered Brewer. "Why should we have any fear as long as we have done absolutely nothing that the police could want us for?"

"But it must be something. Don't you remember the personal questions that the man asked?" replied Lillian.

"Yes, and I haven't yet gotten over kicking myself for having answered them," was Bill Brewer's reply.

At that moment one of the policemen below gave a double rap on the knocker, and at the same time the man who had questioned them half an hour before looked up and caught sight of the three anxious faces peering through the window.

They all dodged back instinctively and looked at each other with questioning eyes.

"Do you think he saw us?" queried Lillian, the first to speak.

"Of course he did," replied Brewer. "There's only one thing left to do now, and that is to go down-stairs and open the door."

"But what if they arrest all of us?" cried Mrs. Snarlton.

"That's the risk we've got to run," was Brewer's reply. Then he started for the stairs, calling back to the girls to wait there for him.

He opened the front door a minute later and asked what was wanted.

"We have a summons for you to appear in court," answered one of the officers.

"A summons!" cried Brewer. "For what?"

"To answer to the charge of criminal infringement on the patents owned by this gentleman here," replied the officer, turning to designate the man who had called this afternoon.

"What patents has he?" cried Brewer in surprise.

The policeman was about to explain when the little man with the narrow eyes that had taken in every detail during his call that afternoon turned to him and said in a sharp voice:

"Officer, serve your summons!"

The policeman was evidently recalled to his duty, and he repeated the regular summons in a singsong voice, every word of which made Brewer sick at heart.

"Are Mrs. Brewer and Mrs. Snarlton here, too?" asked the man who seemed to be in charge of the policemen.

"Yes; but what is that to you?"

"We have summonses for them to appear with you. Will you kindly call them?" requested the man whose very looks spelled trouble.

Brewer clutched the door-knob. He felt faint and giddy. There was a great ques-

tion in his mind as to whether or not he would allow the officers to serve the summonses on the girls and have them dragged into court along with him.

"Won't I do just as well?" he asked.

"No. All three of you are guilty of infringing the patents," put in the man who had called that afternoon in such a strange manner. "I control the patents on an image similar to the American Billikin. I own patents on your image. I dare say it never occurred to you to take out a patent. I asked you this afternoon, and you said you had never thought of it."

Then the whole truth swept over Bill Brewer at once. The idol-making business had gone to smash. This man owned patents which they had infringed. They could be sued, and get into no end of trouble. Why had it never occurred to him to have the thing patented? He knew that it was because they had made money out of it so readily at first, and were so enthusiastic over it, that nothing else mattered.

At that moment he was aware of somebody behind him, and, turning, saw Lillian approaching. The girl had come down to see what the trouble was.

"There's Mrs. Snarlton! Serve the summons on her, officer!" cried the man in the doorway.

The thing was done before anybody realized what had happened, and Lillian was summonsed to appear in court in three days to answer to the serious charge of criminal infringement of patent rights.

She did not understand at all. Brewer called down his wife, and the papers were served on her. He knew that it would be useless to try and keep them from finding her, and they all three might as well stand trial together.

"I told you that you would hear from me again," smiled the man. "I told you it might not be pleasant, too."

His mean tone irritated Brewer to such an extent that he slammed the door in the man's face and then turned to the frightened girls.

CHAPTER LXI.

A CURIOUS CALL.

"WHAT does it all mean?" cried Lillian the moment the door had banged shut.

"It means merely that we won't be able to make our images any more. This man owns the patents to make such an image. I'm not sure that he hasn't taken out such a patent on the very ones that we have made ourselves. But that makes no difference. He owns the rights now, and we will not only have to cancel all our orders, but stand a lawsuit as well."

"But we haven't enough money to fight such a case!" cried Mrs. Brewer.

"Of course, that's just where he has us on the hip. I suppose the scoundrel found that out before he came here this afternoon," replied Brewer.

"But if he owns such patents, he is in the right," was Lillian's remark.

"Of course, we were fools not to think of getting a patent on the thing!" exclaimed the man. "The only thing is, we haven't any chance to retrieve our mistake now. We haven't enough money to fight the case, and would probably lose if we did."

"It seems an awful shame, and everything was going so nicely," put in Mrs. Brewer.

"I'll never forgive myself for not taking out a patent," her husband said. "I thought of it just once, but there didn't seem to be any hurry. Things are done so slowly in this country—"

"Everything but justice," corrected Lillian.

"Yes," admitted Brewer. "That's true. But the worst of this thing is that if it had been in America, the first thing that would have occurred to me would have been to secure all rights."

"What will they do to us at the trial?" queried his wife in a tone of voice that had tears in it. "It seems awful to think of having to stand trial."

"It won't be very serious," answered Brewer. "I think the best thing we can do is to say that we are in the wrong, and give over any right to the man who owns the patent. We will also say that we did not know of any other image being on the market in London of the same kind."

"But ignorance of the law won't help us any!" cried Mrs. Snarlton.

"It may in a case like this. Of course, the summonses read that it was criminal infringement of the patent; but if we can prove that we didn't know anything about such prior rights, the case will just be a civil one, and we will only be sued."

"But they will sue us for such a large amount that we'll never be able to pay it,"

his wife remarked, the worried look deepening in her face.

"Well, we're up against it now." Her husband shrugged his shoulders. "In our excitement we showed true American spirit, and didn't take the trouble to stop and think of precaution."

The girls could not get over the idea of their appearance being demanded in court. It was such a horrible thought, to have to stand trial for such a thing when they were absolutely innocent.

Finding how hard they took it, Brewer tried to cheer them up; but his words had very little effect. They knew the majesty of law in London, and were already scared breathless at what might happen to them.

"Think of having our names on a prison register!" cried Mrs. Brewer.

"It's too awful to think of, Anne!" Mrs. Snarlton cried, shuddering at the thought.

"But it isn't as though you had really done anything," Brewer hastened to reassure them.

"It isn't that! It's the disgrace!" they chorused.

He realized that they must feel the thing to a far greater extent than he did. He began to see it with their eyes.

"Can't we make some kind of a compromise with this man who had the summonses made out?" asked Mrs. Snarlton.

"I'm afraid not," was Brewer's reply. "He seems to be a hardened fellow. I tried to argue with him that it was enough to summons me, but he wants all three of us."

"Don't you think if we gave him all we have, and promised to pay him a sum of money in the future, that he would let us off?" asked Lillian, anxiously trying to think of some way out of the horrid affair.

"No, I'm afraid nothing will do for him except satisfaction. He has that look in his eye, and he certainly has everything in his favor. Right now he can get all we have and more too. Why should he be willing to compromise?"

They realized the logic of his reasoning, but still tried to find some loophole.

The discussion lasted for almost an hour. It was getting on toward ten o'clock when Brewer got up abruptly and remarked:

"Well, I guess it's time for us to go to bed. It's been a rather hard day, and everything seems utterly hopeless. But maybe things will brighten in the morning."

"How can they?" asked Lillian in a dull tone of despair.

"Oh, it's simply—"

Mrs. Brewer's remark was cut off by three sharp raps at the knocker.

"Who can it be at this time of the night?" queried Brewer, stepping rapidly to the door and throwing it open.

On the steps stood the man who had made the trouble concerning the images and caused the summonses to be served. His face bore a serious look, as though he were worried over something, and he spoke abruptly:

"Can I see you for a few minutes, Mr. Brewer? It is something of the greatest importance."

Brewer stood rooted to the spot in blank astonishment, wholly unable to answer. One question pounded on his brain: "What could the sudden return of this trouble-maker mean to them?"

There was but one answer—more trouble.

CHAPTER LXII.

A STRANGE PROPOSITION.

"COME in," offered Brewer as the man stood waiting on the door-step.

He accepted the invitation readily, and Brewer ushered him to a seat.

"I believe I have forgotten to tell you that my name is Baker," began the fellow who had made all the trouble for them. "As you know, I am engaged in the business of making novelties to sell to the trade.

"When I found that you had infringed on patents which I had taken out, I felt that the only thing to do was to prosecute. I am sorry now that I had the summonses served upon you. I think the thing could be regulated without causing you so much trouble."

"Brewer brightened at this suggestion. It gave him new hope, and he was anxious to learn what offer the man would make.

"I think it can easily be settled out of court, Mr. Baker," said the young fellow. "I am sorry that in our ignorance we should have taken advantage of any patent which you had. But I can assure you that we knew absolutely nothing of it."

"I believe you when you tell me that," replied Mr. Baker sincerely. "I have begun to reconsider my rash action, and feel that a trial would be unnecessary and put us both to a great expense, which can be avoided easily."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," was

Brewer's reply. "What suggestion have you to offer?"

"I can withdraw my complaint against you in court. It will then be unnecessary for you to answer the summons."

Brewer was very eager to accept the offer in order to save Anne and Lillian the disgrace of having to appear in court.

"What terms do you offer if you withdraw the case?" asked Brewer.

"I have been thinking of that for some time, and I believe that the best thing I can do," was the reply, "is to suggest that you give me a list of all the people to whom you have sold these images, that I take over all uncompleted orders, and that you give me a written guarantee that you will not make any more of them."

"It seems quite fair," agreed the young fellow, "and I shall consider it."

Mr. Baker seemed quite eager to close the agreement. His eagerness caused a little suspicion to enter Brewer's mind for the first time.

"But," exclaimed the young fellow, "what guarantee will I have from you that you will withdraw the charge?"

"I will give you my word that I won't," replied the other.

"But you ask more from us than our word," replied Brewer. "You wanted a signed paper with our agreement."

"Well"—Mr. Baker shrugged his shoulders—"I can give you a paper in exchange agreeing to withdraw the charge."

"That will be better," answered Brewer. "I'll talk it over with the ladies."

"There is no necessity for doing that, is there?" asked Baker.

Brewer looked at the man steadily for some time, and he saw that the fellow was nervous about something or other.

"But you yourself insisted that the ladies appear in this case when you had the summonses served," cried Brewer.

"But that was a different affair," the other said.

"If you'll excuse me for a few minutes, Mr. Baker, I will talk it over with my family," said Brewer, as he arose to join the girls in the next room.

"But why can't this thing be settled between us?" cried Mr. Baker, rising as though to detain him.

The man's very eagerness made Brewer suspicious of him. He could not understand why the fellow was objecting to his discussing the case with the girls.

At that moment Baker pulled a paper from his pocket and flashed it in Bill's face.

"Here," he cried. "This is a copy of the agreement I want you to sign. You had better do it now while the opportunity it still open to you. If you refuse, I shall withdraw my offer."

Brewer stood for a full minute debating the best course for him to take. He knew that the girls would insist upon his signing the paper, but he did not like the man's manner, and the very haste of Mr. Baker made him go slowly and act deliberately.

As he stood in doubt, the little man's eyes narrowed and he held the paper before Brewer, urging him in a threatening tone to sign it, now that he had the opportunity.

"But what's the hurry? How did you happen to have this agreement made out already?" queried Brewer. "You hardly had time to change your mind since you were here last with the policemen."

Baker seemed greatly taken aback by this sudden question of Brewer's. He seemed to be debating what to reply; and the young fellow watched him closely, trying to discover a motive beneath his hasty manner.

"I had the paper made out before I came here," replied Baker finally, "to save you time and trouble. My lawyer drew the thing up, and if you will only sign it now, I shall give you my agreement to drop the prosecution at once."

"It is very good of you, Mr. Baker," replied Brewer quickly, "but I cannot sign that paper until I talk the thing over with my family. They will no doubt be in favor of it, and I can give you the answer in a moment, if you will only be patient."

"Oh, well, go ahead then. But I'm in an awful hurry, and if you are not back with the answer in five minute's time, I shall withdraw my offer."

"Let me take the agreement that you want signed," offered Brewer. "It will save time to have them read it."

At first the man seemed inclined to keep the paper, then he changed his mind and handed it over to Brewer with the advice that he had only four minutes left in which to come to a decision.

Brewer had been so relieved at first to find that the man was willing to drop the prosecution that he had been anxious to sign anything. But when he found Baker's manner so strange, caution suddenly came to his aid, and he decided to go slowly.

Hurrying into the next room, where he found Anne and Lillian listening at the crack at the door to catch what they could of the conversation between the men, Brewer hurriedly told them Mr. Baker's offer, and asked their permission to sign it.

"It certainly is lucky," exclaimed his wife. "I don't see why you took the trouble to come and ask us about it. An hour ago we would have given anything in the world to have such an offer. Now that it is ours, you seem to be taking unnecessary caution."

"But the man himself is so eager," said Brewer. "It is that which makes me suspicious."

"I didn't like his way of talking a little bit," agreed Lillian. "I think we had better give this thing quite a little thought. We mustn't do anything rash."

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN DOUBT.

"BUT the man has the best of us, whichever way we look at it," cried Mrs. Brewer. "He is offering us a good deal, and I think it would be very foolish if we didn't appreciate and take advantage of it."

"But don't you think it looks suspicious that he is in such an awful hurry?" Lillian asked her.

"No," replied the other girl. "It is quite natural that when he is making us such a splendid offer he will want a quick decision. We must remember that the obligation is all on our side."

"That's true," agreed her husband. "We don't want to run any risk of losing out."

Lillian had been looking at the agreement while they talked. There was a strange light in her eyes as she looked at the paper closely, and then turned to Brewer with a quick question:

"He said that this paper had been made out between the time when he called with the police and now, didn't he?"

"Yes," answered Brewer. "Why?"

"Then he lied!" cried Lillian.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed both of them together, looking at her anxiously.

"You see these corrections on here in ink, don't you?" asked Lillian, holding up the paper to the light and pointing out the marks she referred to.

"Yes," they agreed together.

"You should have noticed that," went on Lillian, turning to Brewer. "You have done more pen and ink work than I have, and it is very plain to see that these corrections in ink on this typewriten agreement are at least twenty-four hours old."

"That's right!" cried Brewer. "I never thought of that before."

"But what can be argued from that?" asked Mrs. Brewer. "I don't see so much in the discovery."

"It only goes to show that the man lied and that this agreement was written before he was supposed to know anything about the case. It looks like trickery to me!" exclaimed Brewer.

"But you mustn't let him know," Lillian cautioned.

At that moment there came a knock on the door which separated them from the room in which Mr. Baker had been waiting.

"Time's up!" Mr. Baker's voice was heard distinctly by all three of them.

They exchanged glances, each cautioning the others to be very careful and not give away what they had learned and suspicioned.

Then Brewer threw open the door and they all joined Mr. Baker.

"Well," he queried. "Is the paper signed?"

There was no reply to his question for some moments, each of them expecting another to answer. Then Brewer took it upon himself to reply:

"I am sorry, but we will have to ask your indulgence for a little longer time, Mr. Baker."

"You mean that the ladies won't sign it?" cried Baker in an angry voice that almost convinced them of their suspicions.

"That's it exactly," answered Brewer. "Mrs. Snarlton wishes to discuss the matter with her husband before signing the paper."

"But her signature is not necessary," replied Baker hotly. "All I want is yours, Mr. Brewer."

"I'm sorry." Brewer did not want to antagonize the man. "I can't sign the agreement until I have her consent."

Baker seemed greatly surprised at Brewer's refusal to come to terms. He looked at them all narrowly, but gave no sign to show what he thought concerning Brewer's refusal to sign the agreement without further time for consideration.

Then he began to threaten. That had no effect upon them, so Baker changed his man-

ner abruptly, took the agreement from Brewer's hands, and said that he would continue the case in court as he had decided at first.

This brought them all to their senses. In spite of Brewer's notion that there *was* some trickery in the affair, he knew that the man must have something against them or he would not dare run the risk of taking the thing to court. So Brewer tried to get the fellow to delay the time of signing the paper.

"I don't see why there should be such an awful rush," said the young fellow. "We have agreed not to make any more of the images, and that protects you perfectly.

"Can't you wait until to-morrow? Then Mrs. Snarlton will have her mind made up and we will probably be able to sign your paper."

But Baker did not take readily to this idea. It seemed that he wanted the agreement signed at once, or not at all.

Finally Brewer grew even more suspicious of the fellow on account of his attitude, and at length made him an abrupt offer.

"If you will wait until four o'clock tomorrow afternoon we will give you our answer. Mrs. Snarlton will be able to see her husband by that time, and I will guarantee that there will be no further delay."

Baker recognized the finality which Brewer put into his words. He felt that it would be useless to argue further.

He agreed to Brewer's proposition in a grumbling manner and left the house at once, after assuring them that he could not understand their folly in refusing to accept his generous offer.

"It may be folly," said Lillian, as he left. "But I don't like that fellow's looks a little bit, and I think we were wise to put him off for a time. It was lucky you thought of telling him that I would talk it over with Bob. Now that you have suggested it, I think it would be a very good scheme. He might be able to throw some light on the case."

They discussed the matter at great length that night, and in the morning, having no work to do, the question of Baker's mysterious manner occupied all their time until Lillian went to the jail to visit her husband.

Bob grew quite excited over the tale. He did not seem so worried that they had lost their image-making business. His chief interest was in the man Baker, who had acted so strangely.

When Lillian had finished, Bob looked up with an eager smile and asked:

"Is he a thin man, with sharp features, a dark complexion, and very narrow eyes?"

"Yes," answered Lillian in surprise. "How did you know?"

Bob smiled strangely and replied:

"I think I know this man Baker rather well. It certainly is lucky that you came to see me before signing that agreement."

"What do you know about him?" breathed Lillian, with great excitement.

At that moment a guard came by with the startling news that all visitors would have to leave the jail, the time being up.

"But tell me before I go what you know about Baker?" urged Lillian frantically.

"It's a long story," said Bob quickly. "I'll write it to you in the morning. All I can tell you now is that you mustn't sign that agreement under any circumstances."

(To be continued.)

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

I HAVE paid well for every sin,
  And blotted out the score;
So great I made my punishment,
  Not God would make it more!

But these no man calls sin—too small
  For penance or regret—
The tardy thought, the careless kiss,
  The groping hand unmet;

The sorrow that I left unsoothed,
  The word I left unsaid.
Ah me, I know what ghosts must stand
  About my dying bed!

Theodosia Garrison.

Loose Change.

BY HELEN A. HOLDEN.

It Takes a Very Expensive Dinner To Settle for Sixty-Five Cents' Worth of Trickery.

MRS. HOY had a sudden inspiration.

She flew across the room to the dresser. Lifting the linen cover at the back, she fished underneath, until she found the key.

Fitting it in the lock, she quickly opened the top drawer.

After rummaging for a few seconds she brought to light a long, narrow pocketbook.

She cleared a corner of the drawer, and into it dumped the contents, the bills and loose change of the pocketbook.

After considering for a few breathless seconds, she picked out from the loose change, two quarters, two dimes, and a nickel.

These she returned to the pocketbook in her hand.

Then she shut the drawer and locked it, again hiding the key under the dresser cover.

"Two quarters, two tens, and a five," she counted, before shutting the pocketbook; "that's enough bait. Now to see if I can catch my fish."

Mrs. Hoy had only been married three months. This was the first serious domestic difficulty she had run up against.

She was grimly determined to solve the problem by herself. She would ask council, or accept advice, from no one.

Her husband, least of all, must suspect there was any trouble. He ran his business without her assistance. She would manage the household alone, or die in the attempt.

It seemed, just now, to Mrs. Hoy's nervous imagination, an actual matter of life and death.

There was another fact that Mrs. Hoy recognized, but hated to admit, even to herself. One which, nevertheless, far outweighed any other and made it impossible to ask her husband's assistance.

The fact was Mrs. Hoy's utter carelessness. Just as her husband was neat and orderly to a painful degree, she was careless and untidy.

"Oh, dear; wherever is my belt?" she would invariably ask, in getting dressed in the morning.

"I think I saw Venus de Milo wearing it, as I came through the living-room just now," her husband would be apt to reply.

It was all very well for him to joke about it, but Mrs. Hoy at last became strongly suspicious.

There was a Venus adopting the belts, ribbons, and various things that disappeared.

But it was not the Venus of the living-room. It was Delia, the Venus of the kitchen.

There had never been anything that Mrs. Hoy could actually put her finger on. But there had been any number of unaccountable, mysterious disappearances.

That morning, while Mrs. Hoy was out, one of her pins—a very valuable one—had disappeared.

This had been the cause of bringing things to a climax. Delia must be proved either innocent or guilty.

Mrs. Hoy had not a doubt of her guilt. But she would give her the benefit of that doubt.

She would leave the pocketbook, with the two quarters, two tens, and the five, as bait, in a carelessly conspicuous place in the dining-room.

Then she would make sure that no one

besides her husband, herself, and Delia, entered the room.

If the pocketbook disappeared, she would have proof-positive that Delia was the guilty one.

She tiptoed noiselessly into the dining-room and looked eagerly round.

What would be the best place for the bait?

Not on the table or any of the chairs. That would be too easy.

At last she had it! Just the place!

Silently, and almost breathlessly, she crossed the room and laid it on the side-board, between the silver sugar-bowl and the cream-pitcher.

Then she stepped back to get the effect from a distance.

"Quite carelessly conspicuous," she decided.

In a few minutes now her husband would be home to luncheon. In half an hour he would be gone again.

Mrs. Hoy sighed with regret that she would not have the whole afternoon to watch the workings of her scheme. But a bridge party at three would claim the latter part of the afternoon.

She hoped the pocketbook would disappear before that time. Then she could dismiss Delia and insist on her leaving at once.

It really was not safe having her hanging round loose among all the best wedding silver.

She hoped Delia would go without making a scene. She had heard of cooks losing their tempers and acting outrageously on being dismissed.

Just at this point her train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of her husband.

Luncheon was an unusually silent and hurried meal.

Mr. Hoy had had an exceptionally busy morning. His mind was still on his business.

Mrs. Hoy's thoughts were absorbed by her domestic troubles. She rehearsed again and again the possible scene with Delia.

Immediately after luncheon Mr. Hoy hurried away.

"I'm sorry, Hester," he said, as he was leaving, "but I'll probably be late in getting home to-night. We're unusually busy at the office."

"How little he suspects," Hester shut the door slowly behind him, "what an unusually busy afternoon I expect to have."

About six o'clock a man stood outside the Hoy apartment. Noiselessly he fitted a key in the lock and gently pushed the door open.

He stepped quickly inside and shut the door softly behind him.

Then he stood still a few minutes listening intently.

"Evidently the coast's clear," and he moved quickly down the hall toward the living-room.

He peered cautiously in.

His ears had not deceived him. It was all quiet and deserted within.

He hurried on into the bedroom.

"There's still something for which to be thankful," he sighed, as he sank into the nearest chair.

It was Kenton Hoy.

"I, who never lost as much as a nickel before!" he exclaimed irritably. "Losing a pocketbook with twenty-five dollars is something of a blow!"

"Pshaw," he added quickly, "I haven't lost it. I've just mislaid it somewhere.

"But I'm not in the habit of mislaying things," he mused; "must have caught the habit from Hester. That's the reason my first suspicion on finding it gone was that I'd been robbed.

"But I'll soon find it just lying round loose somewhere. It seems to me, too, I do remember laying it on the chiffonier while getting into my coat. Of course I'll find it somewhere.

"And it must be found before Hester gets home." Mr. Hoy got quickly to his feet and began to search eagerly about. "It would never do to have her suspect that I'd been careless. She'd harp on it as an endless excuse whenever she loses anything. I'd never hear the end of it."

After five minutes of frenzied search, Mr. Hoy paused for breath.

"I might better go at this systematically," he decided. "As it most emphatically is not on the chiffonier, where is the next most likely place to have left it?

"This is the one and only occasion when I can thank my lucky star for a careless wife. I can count on Hester looking over and round that pocketbook, wherever it is, ninety-nine times to-day, and never having noticed it.

"But there's Delia," a sudden thought striking him. "Delia might have picked it up while dusting round and tucked it away somewhere.

"Delia! Delia!" he called, crossing the

dining-room toward the kitchen. "Friday certainly is not Delia's day out. Where can she be? Delia!" she called louder.

"Goodness, gracious me, Kenton Hoy, how you scared me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hoy, letting herself in suddenly at the front door. "I thought you weren't coming home till late."

"We—you see, I—er—got through early, after all," replied Mr. Hoy.

"Well, I'm thankful you did," said Mrs. Hoy, "for we'll have to go out to dinner to-night."

"Go out to dinner?" asked Mr. Hoy faintly.

"Delia's gone," announced Mrs. Hoy shortly.

"Gone?" gasped Mr. Hoy.

"Yes; come on, and I'll tell you as we go along. I'm awfully hungry, and it's too long a story to tell before we start," said Mrs. Hoy.

"Are we going to your mother's?" suggested Mr. Hoy hopefully, remembering his lost pocketbook.

"At this late hour—without letting them know beforehand? No, indeed!" replied Mrs. Hoy decidedly.

Mr. Hoy did some rapid thinking. He had in his pocket just seventy-five cents in change. What sort of a dinner for two people would that buy?

He had firmly decided not to let his wife know about the lost pocketbook for very good reasons. He wondered how he was going to manage a way out without letting her suspect.

There was one last hope. A Chinese restaurant was always much cheaper than any other.

If they were not very hungry, they could manage to keep within the seventy-five cents. Twenty cents for car fare, twenty-five cents for chop suey, and twenty-five cents for chow main.

"Hester," he began, "I feel a lot like chop suey to-night. We haven't had any for a long time, and—"

"Not for a minute," replied Hester promptly. "I'm starved. You forget I've been playing an exhausting game of bridge all afternoon. And what do you think I found out about Mrs. Tyson? She's as mean as dirt. For refreshments she had only tea and sandwiches. Not the sign of a salad; not even an ice. I'll not have anything more to do with her."

Wherever they went, there would be ten cents for car fare going and another for coming home. That from the original seventy-five cents would leave just fifty-five cents.

"Twenty-five cents apiece for dinner and five cents for a tip," he calculated grimly to himself. Where, outside a Chinese restaurant, could such a dinner be found?

Well, he had done all he could to prevent a catastrophe. He was now forced to step aside and let things take their own course.

He quickly saw where that course would take them. He shrugged his shoulders. It was now up to Hester. She would have to take the consequences.

The more he thought the thing over, the better he liked it. It was perhaps the easiest way out of the difficulty all round.

"All right," he said cheerfully; "come on."

All the way down, the car was crowded. Mrs. Hoy got a seat in the forward part. Mr. Hoy hung from a strap farther down the aisle.

Mrs. Hoy was keenly disappointed. She was very anxious to tell at length the masterly manner in which she had dealt with Delia.

Her husband would at last be forced to recognize her ability. With pride she rehearsed the narrative: the trap she had laid; the disclosure, or the disappearance of the pocketbook; and the climax, or dismissal.

Mr. Hoy was grateful for the silence their separation made necessary. It gave him a chance for completing his plan for what he was about to undertake.

"As we enter the restaurant," he finally decided, "I'll put my hand carelessly in my pocket. Then, with a start of quick surprise, I'll begin to search frantically—"

Just at this second the car stopped. Mr. Hoy found himself helping his wife out of the car, across the street, and into the restaurant.

Before he had time to think further, he was beginning in earnest the part he had just been rehearsing.

His look of startled surprise, as his hand came out empty from his pocket, was perfect. Increased surprise as each in turn was searched unsuccessfully.

It was admirably done. On the faces of the people sitting near showed quick, keen glances of sympathy.

The head waiter came hurrying up.

"What's the matter? Something lost?" he asked hurriedly.

"My pocketbook. It's gone," answered Mr. Hoy truthfully.

Then he glanced swiftly at his wife. It was now up to her.

If she happened to have money with her, they would be able to get dinner. If not—anyway, it was her doings, she had insisted.

Any consideration from the waiter was, of course, not to be expected. They were worked too often, and too successfully, that way for a meal.

"Don't make such a scene," his wife whispered hurriedly. "I have enough."

Mr. Hoy could scarcely refrain from dancing down the room to the table where they were to eat. It had all worked out so beautifully, just as he had hoped.

His wife would see and understand that it was through no carelessness of his that the pocketbook had been lost.

"Tell me about losing your pocketbook," suggested Mrs. Hoy, as soon as they had given their order.

"You saw what happened." It was all Mr. Hoy could do to keep from smiling. "Probably some one in the car—er—must have—"

"Then, how do you account for this?" and his wife laid on the table, between them, the lost pocketbook.

"How — when — where?" stammered Kenton Hoy.

"On the floor in front of your chiffonier this morning, just after you left," replied Mrs. Hoy.

"Now, that's just where I thought I left it—on the chiffonier, not the floor," explained Mr. Hoy. "But, of course, I didn't count on your finding it. You've always lost and never found things before," complained Mr. Hoy.

"I probably wouldn't have this time, if I hadn't fortunately stumbled over it," replied Mrs. Hoy.

"I started to pay a bill this afternoon, and found the pocketbook, with the whole of those twenty-five good dollars, gone. I left the office as early as I could to settle the maddening question of whether my pocket had been picked, or whether I had left it at home," confessed Mr. Hoy at last, somewhat hesitatingly.

"'A fair exchange is no robbery,'" he smiled, as his hand, in restoring the lost pocketbook to its usual place in his pocket, came in contact with a small, flat object.

Pulling it out of his pocket, he tossed it across the table to his wife.

"My pocketbook!" screamed Mrs. Hoy so loud that the diners at the other tables turned to see what had happened.

Mr. Hoy nodded.

"Why, that's the very reason I discharged Delia," continued Mrs. Hoy excitedly. "The pocketbook was gone. I assured her she had stolen it, though, of course, she denied it. I had expected that, so, naturally, I didn't believe it."

"I didn't take it from your drawer," explained Mr. Hoy. "I found it at lunch-time, mixed up with the sugar-bowl and the cream-pitcher on the sideboard. It being your way to mislay things, I slipped it in my pocket for safekeeping, intending to give it to you later on. I went off in such a hurry I forgot it."

"If I were you I wouldn't say anything again—ever again about mislaying things," warned Mrs. Hoy.

Mr. Hoy winced.

Things were still working as he had figured.

The harping had begun.

THE WHITE THOUGHT.

We teeming transients of the sun,
Until our eager race be run,
Bestir us in a hundred ways
To leave, before the caverned dark
Engulf us, some small, vital spark—
A firefly in a somber maze—
To say to those who follow, we
Are not extinguished utterly;
Our mortal, that is less than naught,
Fixed in a white, immortal thought.

Richard Burton.

"The Taint of Manhattan."*

BY FRED V. GREENE, JR.,

Author of "The Man She Saw," "The Unanswered Question," "On the Brink of the Precipice," etc.

New York's Reputation from an Ohio Standpoint, and How Two Families Became Involved in the Toils of False Impressions.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IMPLICATION.

THE tone Watson used when he told his wife that the telephone call was for her, although he had taken the message, was hard—indeed, it was almost cruel—but she paid no heed to this fact.

"Who was it from?" she asked excitedly—her thoughts reverting at once to her brother.

"It was a police-station," he replied, watching her keenly. "They said they were asked to deliver a message to you—to say that a certain person was there under arrest."

"Who—who is he?" she queried breathlessly.

"Don't you know? Can't you suspect?" he sneered.

"Is it Jack?" she burst out in her anxiety, throwing all her caution to the winds.

"Yes—Jack! Jack Harrington! He's caught, and in jail. And now—"

But the telephone-bell rang again, and Watson left the sentence uncompleted to answer it.

"Send him right up," he directed, and explained that Mr. Graham was calling.

"Is he coming up here?" Mabel queried, as her husband turned to face her.

"Of course. Why, you act—"

"I don't want to see him," she interrupted. "I'll go in the other room."

"Mr. Graham won't hurt you," he retorted. "But do as you wish."

As she left the room, a tap on the door took Watson to it, and he faced his employer.

"Hallo, Watson," the other began, but he made no motion to enter. "I telephoned the office a little while ago, and heard that you had got back, as I was anxious to know what you had learned in Bellefont. They told me you weren't feeling well, so I decided to come to you."

"But won't you come in?"

"No, I think not. Let's go down to the café. We can talk better there."

Watson wondered at this procedure, but refrained from questioning, and taking his hat, he followed out into the hall.

"By the way, they've got Harrington," he said.

"Who has?" asked Graham quickly.

"The police."

"How do you know?"

"Because, just before you came, some one phoned to say he had been arrested."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," Graham declared. "And now I think he'll be taught a lesson. He certainly deserves one."

"I agree with you," was all Watson said as they stepped into the elevator.

"How much did the scamp get away with?" Graham inquired as they took seats at a table in the café.

"A little over sixteen thousand dollars."

This news seemed to be a relief to the president.

"Is that all? I was afraid it would be a great deal more than that."

"Isn't that enough?" Watson asked bitterly.

*** This story began in The Cavalier for February.**

"Yes, in a way. But tell me—how did it happen? Who was at fault?"

"Why—I—really I can't say that any one was."

Watson then recalled to the other the conversation they had had, relative to the system which Harrington was using, and of his suggestion that a change was really necessary.

After a moment's thoughtful pause, Graham said:

"Well, I don't think we'll put the blame on any one but Harrington. As a matter of fact, if a fellow wants to be crooked, the finest system in the world won't keep him straight. They always find a way to beat it. So we'll let that matter rest for the present. But I've another one to take up with you—of a personal nature. That's why I suggested coming down here."

"Why—what is it?"

"Now understand, Watson, I'm telling you this for your own good. There may be nothing behind it, and, if such is the case, I want you to understand that I've come to you in the most friendly spirit, just as I'd thank any one for coming to me with like information."

"I am listening," Watson put in, as he endeavored to quell his curiosity.

"Watson, what men does your wife know in New York?"

The suddenness of the question figuratively took Watson off his feet, as he half rose in indignation, then sank back into his chair.

"Why, what do you mean?" he demanded angrily.

"Now don't get mad," the other protested. "I just asked a simple question—"

"And at the same time cast a slur on my wife's name."

"Watson, I don't want to hurt either you or your wife, and if what I'm about to tell you, does so, I want you to feel that I'm doing it entirely for your own good."

"Proceed," the other directed, although he was boiling within.

"Watson, I feel reasonably certain that your wife is in some way mixed up with a man."

On hearing this, Watson was about to spring to his feet in rage, but Graham waved him back in his chair, and added hurriedly: "Understand me correctly. I assert nothing—I simply say that I am reasonably certain. And I admit that I may be wrong, or that Mrs. Watson may be able to explain to your entire satisfaction some incidents with which I am familiar."

"What are they?" Watson asked in a low tone.

There was no avoiding the issue now, and Graham realized this.

"Well, I'll tell you the main one. Yesterday your wife asked Mrs. Graham to exchange checks with her, and my wife did so. She admitted it to me over the telephone last night when I questioned her regarding it. You see, my wife and I had had some argument, as I had heard that a check of hers had been used in a broker's office. So I called up Mrs. Watson, after Mrs. Graham explained how they had exchanged checks, and she admitted to me that such was the case. I then asked her what she had done with the one Mrs. Graham had given to her, and she told me that she had given it to a man."

He paused an instant, and Watson remarked: "Go on—I'm listening."

"But she would not tell me who the man was, although she admitted that he had used it to play the market. Now, of course, it's quite possible it's some sharper who has met your wife, and learning that she is a stranger in New York, has taken it upon himself to impress her with wonderful stories about the great fortunes made by speculation. In any event, I feel it is my duty to bring this matter to your attention."

"I appreciate it, Mr. Graham," Watson said thoughtfully. "And we will get to the bottom of this immediately. Come upstairs with me."

"What for?" the other asked in alarm.

"We will question my wife. Come."

There was a positiveness to Watson's manner and a firmness in his tone that took Graham completely by surprise. He was not accustomed to having his employees dictate to him, and he hesitated to obey. But the strong grasp Watson took on his arm showed plainly that he was very much in earnest.

"I—I'd rather not," Graham protested weakly. "Don't you see—can't you realize—in what a peculiar position I will be placed?"

"Not nearly as peculiar a one as that in which you've placed my wife," Watson declared.

"But I did it for your own good."

"I know you did; I appreciate that fully. And now for my own good, you'll go further. Come."

Graham saw plainly that Watson was in no mood for argument—it was action now with him, and that action led to the elevator. But when they reached the door of the apartment, he made a final stand.

"Don't you see, Watson, I really can't—"

"Yes, you can," the other affirmed, and as he had already thrust his key in the lock, he flung open the door, and pushed his employer before him.

"Mabel," he called, and there was no anger in his voice. "Come here, please."

An instant later Mrs. Watson stood before them.

"Good — evening," Graham stammered, plainly ill at ease.

"Good evening, Mr. Graham," she said.

Watson turned to her.

"Mabel, to whom did you give that check for five hundred dollars—the one you got from Mrs. Graham, and for which you gave her yours, made out for an equal amount?"

Watson's voice betrayed no harshness—in fact, he used his ordinary conversational tone, and there was a reassured look on her face as she glanced into his.

"Why—I—"

But she said no more. Instead, she halted, to glance appealingly from one to the other of the men.

"Tell us all about it," Watson directed. "We both want to know. Don't we, Mr. Graham?"

"Why—that is—you see—"

But Watson cut short his stammered confusion.

"Mr. Graham is very anxious to get at the root of the matter, and so am I. You can explain all by telling us the name of the man to whom you gave the check. Come—speak up."

"This is Mrs. Graham's work!" Mabel suddenly burst out, after a brief pause. "She sent you to my husband."

"Why—why should she do that?" Watson queried.

He glanced from Graham to Mabel, but neither of them seemed willing to answer his question. He noted the fire that flashed in his wife's eyes, and also the fact that Graham appeared to be about as comfortable as if he were seated on a bed of red-hot coals.

"You see, Watson," his employer began at length, "from what I can gather—and I may be entirely wrong, as far as that is concerned—the feminine end of our families have had a very slight misunderstanding."

"Not very slight," said Mrs. Watson.

"I can't see what such an occurrence has to do with the matter we came here to thrash out," Watson put in, and then turned to his wife. "You have not answered my question."

"Which—one?" Mabel faltered.

She knew only too well to what he referred, but she was sparring for time. Not that she felt she had done wrong in giving the money to Jack—it was hers to do with as she pleased—but knowing her husband's feelings toward him, she knew he would be angry at her doing so, as well as keeping to herself the fact that he was in New York.

"You know very well, which question, Mabel; so don't prolong this scene. Because I *will* know, and that in a very few minutes."

His voice had changed from the one he had first used when he entered with Graham, and there was grim determination in it as he added: "Who was the man?"

Mabel stared at him in mute entreaty, but he only returned it with a stern gaze.

"It was—it was Jack!" she burst out.

She did not see the smile of satisfaction that played about her husband's mouth—her eyes rested on the carpet.

"Jack who?" Watson insisted.

"You know!" she cried. "My brother Jack!"

"You mean Harrington?" said Graham.

Mabel only nodded her head in assent.

"I knew it," Watson said calmly, and Mabel looked up quickly into his face, to wonder at the smile of contentment that rested there.

"*You* knew!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. From the moment Mr. Graham told me that you had given a man a check for that amount, I felt certain who it was. That's why I brought him here—to let him hear with his own ears."

"He wanted the money so he could speculate," Mrs. Watson informed them—her husband's manner gave her renewed courage. "That's how he lost what he—took from you," she added, as she faced Graham. "He thought he could win, and then pay you back."

"And he lost," the president remarked.

"Yes, he lost the *money*," she agreed, and put a decided emphasis on the last word. "And that means, unless you decree to the contrary, that he has also lost his

manhood, and the honor of his family. What man can retain his own self-esteem after a term in prison? What future has he? And what a crushing thing for his family—those to whom he is dear. You might better kill him outright—it would be more humane."

"If there was no punishment for sin, sin would rule the world," Graham rejoined.

"Sin rules the world anyway, so what's the difference?" Mabel asserted bitterly. "And—"

"Whether it does or not," Watson interrupted, "we are drifting from our subject. Mr. Graham, are you perfectly satisfied with my wife's statements regarding the check?"

"Why—certainly. Of course."

"And so am I," were Watson's words, that brought to his wife's face a joy that had not rested there since he had first announced his coming to New York. "In fact, I think she did exactly as you or I would have done, had we been in her place. If we won't stand by our own flesh and blood, who will?"

"Quite true — quite true!" Graham agreed emphatically.

"And now, Mr. Graham, that we've settled this matter to the satisfaction of every one concerned, I've a little one to take up with you."

"With me?" the other exclaimed, in a most surprised tone.

"You said when you first brought up this check matter, that you felt it was your duty to let me know of something that had taken place, and in which my wife was implicated. If you will recall it, you will remember that I resented your insinuations. And you then explained that you were only doing what you would thank any one else for doing, if there was a matter in which your wife was concerned, and with which you were not familiar. You remember saying that, don't you?"

"Fully! But why?"

"That's what I'm about to explain," Watson returned. "And I trust you will take the matter as you said you would."

CHAPTER XVII.

A SECOND THIRD DERGEE.

"WHY, what do you mean?" Graham queried excitedly.

"Just what I say," Watson replied. "I will tell you something about *your* wife. It may be all right—I hope such will prove to be the case. Nevertheless, I feel it my duty to tell you. Then you can look into the thing yourself."

"Are you inferring that my wife is not all she should be?" the other demanded hotly.

"Not at all," Watson replied coolly, and the look he bestowed upon Mabel calmed to a certain extent the agitation he saw in her face.

"Then out with it! What is it? And let me tell you if you have slandered Mrs. Graham without cause, you will surely suffer for it."

"It *does* make a difference whose ox is gored, doesn't it?" Watson remarked, and there was just the trace of a sneer in his words.

"I demand to know to what you are referring!"

Graham had already risen, and his angry looks denoted that he was very much in earnest.

"Mr. Graham," Watson began, plainly unruffled at the other's manner, "are you aware of the fact that your wife has dined with another man during your absence from the city?"

"It's—it's a lie!" the president shouted. "A dirty, contemptible lie, and you'll suffer for it!"

"Is that treating me fairly?" Watson asked.

"I'll treat you as you should be treated!" the other stormed. "I'll show you that you can't go about slandering women, and then let the thing end there. I'll show you—"

He had already started for the door, but Watson sprang in front of him, barring his way.

"You'll hear me out," he asserted, and the firmness of his tone caused Graham to realize that he was not to be crossed.

"Then—then finish, but be mighty quick about it."

"The evening of the day you left the city to go on your hunting trip, Mrs. Watson and I went to a certain restaurant for dinner, and saw Mrs. Graham and a man dining together there. The man was slightly under the influence of drink—"

"It's not so," the other interrupted. "You—you're mistaken."

"I couldn't be," Watson asserted.

"But you are," Graham retorted hotly. "Mrs. Graham rarely dines out, and never in the company of drunken men."

Watson nodded toward his wife.

"Ask Mrs. Watson."

Graham turned to her, and she said: "It's true. I saw her."

"You—you surely are mistaken. It must have been some one who looked like her." Then Graham added in a more positive tone "You *are* mistaken."

"Very well, if you wish it that way, the matter is closed. I simply brought it to your attention, just as you did another matter to me."

But Graham suddenly became greatly excited.

"No; the thing isn't closed! Not by a whole lot! You've both made a charge against my wife, and now I'll make you prove it. I want you to come to my home —now!"

Mrs. Watson gave a slight start of alarm, and glanced appealingly at her husband. She did not relish the idea of such a visit; but Watson felt quite the reverse.

"Very well," he agreed. "I'm perfectly willing to do so."

His sudden acquiescence proved somewhat of a surprise to his employer, who would have concealed it, but was unable to do so.

"And you will, too?" Graham asked of Mabel.

"I—I would rather not," she replied hesitatingly. "I cannot see that my presence is necessary."

"But *I* can," her husband said, "and you will accompany us."

The tone he used was so decisive that she feared to oppose him.

There was no time wasted in preparation. While Mabel put on her hat and coat, Graham summoned a taxi by phone; and when they reached the curb, it was drawn up there, awaiting them, and they were soon at the Grahams' hotel.

Mrs. Graham was much surprised to see them, and glanced from one to the other without speaking, although she nodded a stiff greeting.

They all remained standing, and Graham himself broke the awkward silence.

"Mrs. Watson has made full explanation of the little matter we discussed together before I left to go to them," he said to his wife. "We both owe her an apology."

"We do?" she remarked coolly.

"Yes. The check she wanted was for her brother—Mr. Harrington. He claimed he wanted to speculate."

"He not only claimed it," Mrs. Watson interrupted warmly. "He *did* want it for that purpose. He wished to win back enough to pay you what he took, Mr. Graham. He's not as bad as you would make him out to be. He—he isn't," she added with a choke of sorrow in her voice.

"That is a different matter entirely," Graham said decisively, "and one in which, at present, I am not interested. There is another case on hand just now."

He then faced his wife.

"I went to Mr. Watson and told him of my suspicions, just as I would to any friend, only to learn that the man with whom Mrs. Watson has had business dealings is her own brother."

Mrs. Graham gave way to a slight indication of apprehension, as she repeated thoughtfully: "Her *brother?*"

"Yes," Watson put in.

"And then, when the matter was explained to the satisfaction of all concerned," Graham went on, "Mr. Watson told me that *you* are in some way interested in a man, too."

"I?" Mrs. Graham exclaimed.

"That's what I said. Now, what have *you* to say about it?"

"I hardly think we should carry on our family discussions before our friends," she remarked haughtily.

"I differ with you there," Graham retorted. "Mr. Watson and his wife both state that in my absence from the city you were seen by them at a restaurant, in the company of a man who was intoxicated. Now, what have *you* to say about it?"

Mrs. Graham glanced coldly from one to the other; then she said, icily: "I have nothing to say. Nothing whatever."

"But you *will* have," Graham asserted angrily. "I demand an answer. Is it true or not?"

"Your friends have made the statement," she contended. "That should be sufficient for you."

"But it isn't," and Graham's voice softened materially. "I want you to tell me. If it's not so, deny it."

"I can't. I—"

"You will, I say," Graham stormed.

"You interrupted me as I was about to remark that I can't say that it isn't so. It is true. I was seen by them in a restaurant —you were away on your hunting trip— and the man was slightly intoxicated. Now, are you satisfied?"

Graham stared at his wife, and his looks proved that he was perplexed at what he had just heard. But his wife only returned his stare of bewilderment with one of coldness.

"Then—then it is true!" he gasped.

"Every word of it!" she answered emphatically.

"I—I can't believe it," Graham stammered.

"Why shouldn't you. Mr. and Mrs. Watson say so, and so do I. Surely that ought to convince you."

Suddenly all the pent-up wrath in Graham returned, and he glared at his wife.

"Yes, I believe it! I've got to do so. But I didn't until you said it was so. I trusted you; I thought you, above all other women, were free of the taint of Manhattan. But now I know differently."

Then he turned on her savagely.

"But there's one thing I don't know, but I will."

"Yes," Mrs. Graham said, without any evidence of fear.

"Yes," he repeated. "But who is the man?"

"What man?" she queried in a tone that only tended to aggravate his rage.

"You know very well. You're only playing for time to give you the opportunity to think up some name. So tell me instantly —who is he?"

"I don't need to think up a name," she replied. "It was Harry—my own brother."

"Your—*brother!*" Mrs. Watson exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes. We both have them, it seems, and they've both brought suspicion upon us."

"I don't believe it," Graham declared. "Where's your proof?"

"I can furnish that, too, and will, in due time." Then she turned to Mrs. Watson. "It's a peculiar coincidence, isn't it—how our brothers—"

"But I forbade your ever seeing him again," Graham broke in. "You've disobeyed me."

"I'm not a child," Mrs. Graham retorted, facing her husband. "He's my own brother; and blood is thick, you know. And when he wrote me some days ago, telling me how well he is doing, I wrote back to him that when the first opportunity presented itself I would take dinner with him.

"You see, Mrs. Watson, some years ago, my brother and Mr. Graham had a violent quarrel, and they've never spoken from that day. Harry was younger then, and perhaps he spoke hastily. But no matter whether he did or not, he regrets the unfortunate occurrence, and would like to have everything as it was before the thing happened."

"He would, eh?" Graham snapped.

"Since the quarrel, I have only seen him twice," she continued to Mabel, ignoring her husband's words. "Once, about two years ago, and then again the night that you saw me. Harry was so delighted at being with me again that he took just a little—a little too much wine—he never could stand much, anyway—and it went to his head."

"We both have brothers we love, haven't we?" Mrs. Watson said thoughtfully.

"But they're of a different stamp," Watson put in.

Mrs. Graham turned to her husband.

"Don't you think it's childish of you to bear Harry the ill feeling you do? You know how dear he is to me, and your attitude toward him hurts me terribly. And you're hurting Harry, too. You can't imagine how glad he was to see me."

"Was he?" Graham remarked. He gave no evidence of interest in the matter.

Suddenly Mrs. Watson stepped before him.

"Tell me one thing, Mr. Graham. Do you intend to prosecute my brother?"

"To the fullest extent of the law," he returned without hesitation. "Any one who, as he did, betrays the confidence placed in him warrants as severe a punishment as can be meted out."

"Then that—that is final?" she choked.

"Absolutely so. His case is different from Mrs. Graham's brother—Harry really committed no sin—and—"

"Then you'll forgive him?" his wife burst out.

"Perhaps. We'll see."

Mrs. Graham's face beamed with joy, and she stepped toward Mrs. Watson.

"I'll do my best for you," she whispered. "Perhaps—"

"Come, Mabel, we will go," Watson interrupted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FORWARDED LETTER.

WHEN Harrington thought he had ridden far enough to escape detection, he alighted to shamble along in a disheartened way. His last hope of restitu-

tion gone, he little resembled the man he had been up to a few days before.

Now his step was faltering, his head hung upon his breast; his face, when he raised it, was deeply lined and haggard, and his eyes sunken and wild looking.

He had already taken on the aspect of a hunted being, and cringed if he heard hurried footfalls behind him.

For some time he wandered on aimlessly, little heeding where his steps were leading him. He did not notice that the street down which he was walking ended at the river.

But a policeman on the other side of the street was watching him keenly, recognizing in his manner the same utter despondency that he had seen in many others. And, divining that Harrington was making for the water as a means of ending his troubles, he stepped quickly after him.

He had almost caught up to him, when Jack heard the footsteps behind him; and, facing about, shrank back at the sight of the uniform he had come to dread.

But before the policeman could speak, Harrington burst out: "You can take me. I want to be arrested. I can't stand it any longer."

A few questions explained everything, and the officer led Harrington to the police station, where already Graham's request to have the prisoner apprehended had been received from headquarters, and Jack was put in a cell to be held for further advices.

The next morning he was arraigned at a police court, and sent to jail, to await word from Bellefont, where he would be taken to face his crime.

That morning Mabel visited him, and they had a brief talk. But Harrington was in no mood for it; and, as he showed this so plainly, she soon left him, realizing that her efforts to console him were fruitless.

He was utterly disconsolate, and appeared almost eager to be taken back to the little Ohio town.

He had refused to fight extradition, and only awaited the arrival of the officer from Bellefont.

It was late that afternoon—Harrington expected to start West the next morning—when Graham received a letter that caused him to examine it intently.

Then he sent for Watson.

"Here's a letter addressed to Harrington," he said. "It's been forwarded to me from the pottery. What shall I do with it?"

Watson took it, and studied the name of the firm which was printed in the upper left-hand corner.

"From the return address," he said, "I should infer that these people are brokers."

"Suppose you take it to him," Graham suggested. "It might prove of some importance."

Watson agreed to this suggestion, and hurried to the jail where his brother-in-law was confined.

Harrington was somewhat surprised to receive a call from Watson, but only stared at him in a disinterested way.

"Jack, I've got a letter here for you," Watson said after a few words of greeting.

The prisoner took the envelope mechanically, but made no attempt to learn anything of its contents.

"Aren't you going to read it?" Watson asked.

Harrington looked up dully, as if this procedure had not occurred to him. Then he slowly tore open the envelope to gaze at the sheet it contained.

With that he leaped to his feet so suddenly that Watson sprang back in alarm.

"It's all right!" Harrington shouted. "I've won! Read!"

He thrust the letter toward his brother-in-law, whose excitement rose as he realized what this meant to Jack.

"And didn't you know it?" Watson queried.

"No, I had no idea," was the reply.

"I can't understand it."

"But I can," Jack burst out. "I remember I purchased a block of that stock some time ago. Then the price dropped, and they wired me for more margin. I couldn't send it to them, and supposed they had sold me out. Then I saw how the stock jumped up, and realized that I had missed my chance. But it must have risen before they sold it, and now—think of it, Ben—I've got twenty-one thousand dollars in these brokers' hands, waiting for me to claim it."

And it was a fact. The letter was from the firm with whom Harrington had done all his business previous to his coming to New York, and upon whom he had called first with the check his sister had given him, only to find that the man he asked for was not there. Had he been, all the anguish Harrington had suffered meantime would have been prevented.

"How can I get the money?" he now asked excitedly.

"I — I don't know," Watson replied. Then added: "But what would you do with it if you had it?"

"Do with it?" the other repeated. "Do with it! Why, I'd pay back every cent, with interest, I took from Graham. Every cent, and then I'd go back to Bellefont and serve my sentence. I've committed a crime, and I'm willing to suffer for it. But, Ben, I've suffered already far more than any one will ever know. Then, when I'm free again, I'll start all over—I'll be a new man; and I tell you, I've learned my lesson —one I'll never forget."

"I'll be back soon," Watson told him abruptly, and without further words hurried from the jail and back to his place of business.

He went directly to Graham's office, and in a few words told him of the letter and of Harrington's desire to pay back, with interest, all he had stolen, and then to take his punishment for the crime.

"But must he become a jailbird?" Watson pleaded. "He's suffered horribly for what he did, and by making restitution couldn't his mistake be overlooked? Couldn't he be given another chance?"

At first Graham did not reply—he was revolving the matter in his mind.

"I hardly know what to say," he began at length. "But suppose we don't press the charge and let him go free—what assurance have we that he'll do as he says he will?"

"I'll tell you. I'll get him to give me an order on the brokers for the money, then you can take out what's due you, and give him the balance."

"But do you think he'll do that?"

"I know he will."

"Then try it. Go to him again."

Watson hurried to the jail once more, and Harrington willingly did as suggested, with the result that a little later, after a call at the brokers', Watson handed Graham a check for a little over twenty-one thousand dollars.

"To-morrow he'll be a free man," the president announced. "He's shown that at heart he's honest—that he just made a mistake, that's all."

When Watson burst in upon his wife late that afternoon and told her the good news, she was beside herself with joy.

"Is it really so?" she asked incredulously—it seemed altogether too good to be true.

"Yes, and to-morrow evening he'll be dining with us. We'll help him to a new start, and I know Graham will offer his assistance too."

"Isn't it strange?" Mabel remarked. "Jack will be dining with us to-morrow night, and Mrs. Graham told me to-day—she called and we spent a delightful afternoon together—that her brother is to dine with them to-morrow, too."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"And Ben," Mrs. Watson added, as she placed her hands on her husband's shoulders and looked up into his face, "I know we're going to like New York, aren't we?"

"Like it! Why, of course," he answered. "Why wouldn't we?"

"Well, you see, I was sure I wouldn't when we first came here. I was suspicious of every one, even of Mrs. Graham. I didn't think there was one good person in Manhattan, and books and plays are all to blame for my ridiculous ideas. But I see now how silly I was. Still, I really don't think I was entirely at fault, was I?"

Watson drew her to him and stroked her hair lovingly as he laughed: "If there's blame to fasten on any one, we'll hang it on the authors of anything that gives the public the impression that Manhattan is tainted and going to the bad as fast as it can get there. But we *know* there's virtue, justice, and forgiveness in it, don't we? And with those three principles with us, what more can we want?"

She looked up into his eyes.

"We do indeed, Jack," she answered.

(The end.)

LOVE'S COLORS.

HER cheeks are red, her eyes are blue,
Her brow is white above;
Unto the flag, oh, heart, be true,
For it belongs to Love!

Felix Carmen.

Awaiting the Event.

BY FRANK WILLIAMS.

Commencing the Day by Being on Tenter-Hooks, Father Was on Nearly Everything Else, Including His Uppers, a Railroad Tricycle, and the Town.

IF you see a young man go into his business office reading a typewritten list of proper names, muttering to himself incoherently, and tossing a coin to see whether it will be a Clarence or a Clarissa, you may well extend your sympathy. For upon his brow is written all the anxiety of the world, and in his heart is the hope that has perpetuated humanity.

So, when Bert Emerson reached his office near Columbus Circle half an hour late one Saturday morning, his gray-haired, motherly stenographer—he didn't have a young one out of respect to Myrtle's feelings—grasped the situation immediately from the depths of her two decades of experience. She at once began to assume the load of responsibility that he otherwise would have shouldered.

"This is your regular day at the bank, Mr. Emerson," she said in reminder.

"The bank? Oh, yes, the bank, to be sure," said Emerson, startled. "Got to have some money, of course." Then he trailed off incoherently: "I hope they won't wait a minute longer than necessary to let me know which it is, and if Myrtle is all right—"

The stenographer got out her note-book in a businesslike way.

"As to that big contract with the Indiana Underwear Company for sixty-five Toreador motor-trucks that you were speaking of yesterday," she prompted. And Bert Emerson jerked himself back from the little house in Forest Lawns to the hard realities of the moment. But it brought a pleasant thought to his mind.

"Yes, if we get that through," he remarked more cheerfully, "it will be the making of this New York office, and probably I will get a car of my own to ride in, and perhaps be made Eastern manager. Of course, I will want to hold that place," he went on dreamily, "until the kid comes along to take it—but supposing it should be a girl— I beg pardon, Miss Croft, kindly take dictation."

Bert Emerson had a good future before him with the Toreador motor people, having when he first joined them worked up through their shops before being put in charge of their New York agency. He had been married three years, and lived at Forest Lawns, a little suburb in Long Island, only a few minutes from New York by the new tubes. Now at this most critical time he was driven from his home by a flock of female relatives and told to await news at agency of the unpoetic ring of a telephone-bell in a business office.

He had planned all his life that on such a day, if never again, he would remain at home; but wise dowagers, including his own mother and mother-in-law, had warned him away, saying that he could do no good in the house and would be merely adding another nervous strain.

"Now, Bert," his mother-in-law had told him that morning as he left the house, "we have you in mind. As soon as events seem certain we will ring you up on the wire. Then you must go out to your mother's, at Elmwood, and wait for the next and the last message, which I hope will set your mind fully at rest."

This, then, was the arrangement, and the first call was the one for which he anxiously waited.

After the first hard hour or so the young

man got a little more into the sweep of business and scarcely noticed the passage of time, his quick mind bending itself concentratedly upon each matter that came before him in the line of business.

Suddenly the telephone rang. He jumped like one who touches a live wire.

"Hallo," he asked fearfully.

"Is this you, Bert?" came a mellow feminine voice.

"Yes, mother, what is it? Nothing has happened? Myrtle is all right? I can't do anything—"

"Just wait a moment, Bertram," said the calm voice of his mother-in-law, "and I will tell you all about it."

"Yes?"

"We think that it would be a good idea for you to get out to your mother's house at Elmwood as soon as possible. That's where you are to wait, you know. There is an eleven-forty-five train from the new station that you can get if you hurry, but if you miss it you can't get another until half past one. It would hardly do for you to wait as long as that."

"All right," cried Emerson excitedly. "I'll hurry down-town this minute."

"Your mother hasn't come yet, but we expect her momentarily," continued the voice at the other end, "so she won't be at Elmwood when you get there, but you will find everything comfortable and ready for you."

"I shall start this minute, mother."

"All right, Bert; good-by."

"Good-by."

Emerson sprang to his feet as soon as he had hung up the receiver.

"We will let the rest of those unimportant letters go, Miss Croft," he said. "If anything big breaks, you can reach me by calling Elmwood three-nine, which is a drug-store near the house where I shall be. I don't think anything will come up, but it's better to be on the safe side."

Emerson looked at his watch hurriedly and whistled.

"Fifteen minutes to catch the train!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if I can do it?" And, struggling into his new spring overcoat, he made all speed to the Fifty-Ninth Street Subway station.

When he presented his commutation ticket at the gate of the new Pennsylvania station the guard searched it carefully for an unpunched ride, but found none.

"Your ticket is entirely used up, Mr. Emerson," he said. "The new ones are on sale at the first window, but you will have to hurry."

Bert leaped to the spot indicated, gave his name, and pulled out a roll of bills. He counted it. Six dollars! Slipping it under the window, he received his ticket in the nick of time.

Comfortably seated in the train, he searched his clothes for additional funds. His right trousers-pocket yielded up a quarter, but that was all. Several searchings failed to reveal another cent.

"By George," he cried suddenly, "I forgot to go to the bank, after all, and here I am, practically strapped! Why didn't Miss Croft remind me again before I came out? I can't be expected to remember everything on a day like this."

During the short ride to Elmwood, which was one station short of Forest Lawns, he strove to keep his mind from the impending event, as he knew that worry over the matter would not help him in the slightest degree. He was beginning to grow hungry, and he anticipated pleasurably the lunch he would have in his mother's house. He had never been in the place but once, as she had moved there but a week or so before, but he figured that the servant, under his mother's orders, would have everything in readiness.

What was his surprise, therefore, to meet this same servant on the front steps, a scowl on her face, angry words on her lips, and a bundle in her arms.

"Why, Katie," he said, "where are you going?"

"Sure an' I'm goin' to get out of this place, you can bet a hat," replied the domestic. "I never did like these towns, anyhow, and now that the missus don't keep a civil tongue in her head I won't stay another minute."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Emerson, astonished. "Surely you're not going off this way without saying a word?"

"I am that," said Katie stoutly. "The missus and me simply can't get along together. Just this mornin' we had a row about washin' the windows, and she says to me, says she, after a long lecture: 'Katie, you're thicker than a cobblestone.' 'That bein' the case,' says I to myself, 'we'll see how you get along without the cobblestone.' And I packs up my stuff. I'm on my way back to the city now."

A half-hour's argument and pleading

failed to produce any effect upon the woman, and Emerson regretfully saw her make her ample way down the little street to the station. He turned into the house with a sigh. There was nothing to be done now except find what he could to eat, so, after hanging his coat and hat in the hall, he went into the kitchen.

A diligent search failed to reveal anything edible. The ice-box was empty, except for half a bottle of milk and some old lettuce. In the corner stood the cake and bread boxes wide open; there was not a can of anything on the shelves, and the only prospect that offered itself was some coffee and sugar which, combined with the milk in the bottle, might provide drink at least. He put a kettle of water on the gas-stove and went down to the basement.

After stumbling round in various dark and unfamiliar bins, he came upon a heap of potatoes, but that was all. Gathering half a dozen of these in his hands, he retraced his way, dirty and out of temper.

By this time it was one o'clock, and the pangs of a healthy hunger would no longer be denied. He must get something to eat, and that soon, or, worried and nervous as he was, he might become ill—a circumstance not to be thought of just at this time.

Ruefully he pulled out the quarter that still remained to him and looked at it, all the time anathemizing himself for his asinine stupidity in not having made the trip to the bank.

That his mother's usually ultramethodical house should be denuded of all kinds of food was explainable upon only one ground. Katie had taken what she found to complete her masterly revenge and was bearing it away with her. That she had taken nothing valuable he had made sure before her departure.

He might catch Katie yet, he thought, glancing out of the window; but even as he looked he saw the electric train draw up to the station at the end of the street, and a moment later heard the whistle signalizing its departure. His last hope of Katie was gone.

There was only one thing to be done. He must buy something to eat. Locking the house carefully, he took his unfamiliar way toward the small business center of the town, a few blocks away, and entered a grocery-store. He had allowed himself fifteen cents of his twenty-five for purchases, reserving a last dime for a telephone-call. He did not know how long it would be before he would hear from his home, and he was again becoming anxious that no word was sent him. He had almost decided not to wait, but to relieve his nervousness by communicating with his home, even against orders.

Making a confidant of the grocery clerk, Emerson spent no less than twenty minutes disposing of his fifteen cents to the best advantage, and returned to the house partially happy in the thought that at least he would have something to eat to fortify himself against the hours of uncertainty.

As he unlocked the door he saw a slip of paper on the threshold that had evidently been pushed there by some visitor. With a query of surprise, he set down the bundle in the best parlor chair, and unfolded the bit of paper. It bore the business letterhead of the druggist on the next corner, and said:

MRS. EMERSON:
You are instructed to call Columbus 9999 at once.

"My office!" he cried, astounded. "Now, who on earth can possibly want me there? I cannot think of anything important, and yet Miss Croft would not call me unless it were absolutely necessary. Perhaps the Indiana underwear people have clenched that sale of cars by wire, and she wants me to know it. It seems improbable, but yet it's possible."

A strange sound from the kitchen caused him to leap through the house on the run. The teakettle was a roaring furnace, for, the water having boiled away in his absence, the graniteware had burned through and cracked in a dozen places. It was one of these cracks he had heard. Profanely he jerked the ruined utensil off the fire, threw it into the garbage-can, and turned off the gas.

With every obstacle that appeared to defeat his securing something to eat, his hunger grew more and more insistent until now he was famished to the point of actual suffering. Taking a roll in his hand, and stuffing another in his pocket, he again locked the house and started to the drug-store munching somewhat after the manner of Benjamin Franklin.

Should he call the office? Here he was with just the price of five minutes' conversation in his pocket, and no telling what need there might be for it later. He knew not a soul in the town from whom he might

borrow, and realized that, had it not been for the druggist thinking the message he received had been for Mrs. Emerson, Sr., he never would have gotten it. His perplexity was heightened by worry over the "event," news of which he had not heard now for two hours.

But yet this ten cents, spent in the good cause of business, might mean more to him than he could imagine, so perverse is fate when working through circumstance.

Swallowing the last of his first roll, he sat down in the booth, asked for his number and, when instructed by the operator, let slip his only dime with a quaking heart.

For a long time silence greeted him, and then a strange voice said: "Hallo!"

"Hallo," cried Bert, exasperated. "Is this Columbus 9999?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, this is Emerson, Bert Emerson—the man who rents the office. Where is Miss Croft?"

"Oh, she is out to lunch, and asked me if I wouldn't stay here until she came back, so I could give you a message that came over the wire. I will read what she has typewritten," came the voice. "Here it is: 'Mr. Elliot Robbins, representing two other gentlemen besides himself, called Mr. Emerson this morning half an hour after he had left on a matter which he describes as a matter of the utmost importance. He would not state what the matter was, other than to say that Mr. Emerson was to connect with him on the phone at once, when he would learn all the facts.' That's all," concluded the voice at the other end of the wire.

"But I can't call him up," cried Bert despairingly. "I haven't a cent. Tell Miss Croft to call—"

"Five minutes is up," broke in the voice of the operator. "Ten cents, please."

"I haven't any ten cents, operator," pleaded Emerson hopelessly. "Won't you give me just a minute longer? This is most important."

"Ah, when'll we ever get rid of you telephone dead-beats?" exclaimed the girl, disgustedly severing the connection.

Emerson sat in a beautiful ultramarine funk.

"Elliot Robbins," he thought painfully. "This is important. If the Long Island Railroad wants to order those motor-trucks I should certainly know it, although I figured the issue was dead long ago, I hadn't heard from them in so many weeks. Yet, three men in conference sounds good, and Elliot is way up in the company. Did a man ever have such a day of the pranks of misfortune as I am having?

"Here is probably ten thousand dollars' worth of good business going to the dogs and I cannot touch it because I sit here like a tramp without a cent. Why, I cannot even telephone home to learn whether or not I have a son and heir, or a daughter and heiress. Such a situation is annoying beyond all speakable expression, particularly as I am now going to try to borrow from this sanctimonious druggist."

He rose from the telephone-desk and approached the man with the black skull-cap who was pounding something with a glass pestle. He explained the situation to him briefly, and wound up with a touching appeal for a quarter, if possible, but if not that, a dime. He pointed out that his mother lived in the middle of the block, and because of the newness of the house had no telephone as yet, but expected to have very shortly.

Moreover, he stated, she was not very well, and was accustomed to buying considerable medicine—a fact which he thought might prove a sop to Cerberus.

"Yes," said the druggist calmly, "she does buy considerable medicine, but so far she has charged it all. How do I know she will ever pay?"

"Look here," said Emerson, with asperity, "Mrs. Emerson carries an account at the best shops in New York, so I guess she will be able to send you a check for what's coming to you. At least it's probable."

"When I see it I'll begin to lend to somebody who claims to be her son," the man returned just as calmly, pounding away with his glass pestle, and Bert knew he was up against a hopeless proposition. Mechanically he pulled out his second roll and bit a chunk out of it viciously.

"Excuse me," said the druggist, "this store is a post-office, a railroad station, an information bureau, and a loafing-place; but there are two things it ain't, and those are a barber-shop and a restaurant."

Emerson walked obediently out and down the block to his mother's residence, where he opened his packages and proceeded to make a much-needed meal. This restored his confidence in himself, and, finding a good cigar in his pocket, he smoked for a while in a more pleasant frame of mind.

"Here is the situation," he told himself

tersely. "I can't call up anybody whatever, but there are two avenues of escape open. My family will either call me up, or I can take a train the remaining five miles home. I won't consider taking a train, because I have strict orders to remain here until I get word to come; but I will sit down in that drug-store, next to the instrument, and wait for my call."

So deciding, he locked all the windows, saw that everything was in good shape inside, locked the doors, and put the key in the little porcelain turtle that hung on the wall for that purpose. The druggist did not evince any particular joy at seeing his unwelcome visitor, but said nothing as he stood rolling minute pills with the greatest care.

Bert sat down at the telephone-desk and looked at his watch. It was half past two. Certainly there *must* be a message for him any minute now!

"I am expecting a call of very great importance," he vouchsafed to the apothecary, with dignity, in explanation of his return, and the man grunted.

"You left your umbrella here when you went out before," he said, pointing to a corner.

"Oh, thank you very much," said Bert, gratefully securing the article, "and— By George, I think I'll need it sure enough! There comes the rain; a regular spring rain. I guess we're in for it now."

Again the druggist grunted, this being the only sound during the next half-hour, except the rattle of paper as he wrapped prescriptions. Emerson became frantic with impatience, and fumed at his helplessness, interlarding the roar of distant thunder with his own exclamations of rage and anxiety.

Surely they must have something to tell him at home by this time.

It was cruel to send him off to this forsaken hole at such a time, and then leave him fretting, without even reassuring him that everything was all right.

Suddenly the bell jangled violently, and Bert leaped a foot into the air.

"Hallo!" he cried.

"Hallo," said the operator, "is this Elmwood three-nine?"

"Yes."

"This is Central, and I have instructions to say that owing to the large amount of repairs and new installation going on, it has been decided to cut out the Elmwood circuit until to-morrow morning. This will not be done for half an hour, so that anybody wishing to make calls before that time may have opportunity to do so."

"Very well," said Bert desperately, "give me Forest Lawns six-three."

"Forest Lawns six-th-r-r-r-r-ee," replied the girl mechanically.

Bert heard the click of wires, the singing of the receiver, the voices of the girls in the exchange, and then this:

"Ten cents, please."

With a cry of rage he crashed the receiver on the hook and seizing his umbrella in one hand and his overcoat in the other, went heedlessly out into the rain in the direction of the railroad station.

"I'll take a train whether they said to or not," he growled. "I can't stand this suspense any longer. I must know how Myrtle is, and I must communicate with Elliot Robbins. Next time I have a—" he hesitated a moment—"kid," he blurted out indignantly, "I shall have no such performance as this, relatives or no relatives, believe me. You'd think it was totally a female affair. That kid's got a father just as much as any other kid.

"When'll that three o'clock train be along?" he asked of the station-agent who was tacking a new announcement on the wall of the waiting-room.

"About six o'clock, I guess," the other replied indifferently, stepping back and eying his work.

"Six o'clock!" gasped Emerson blankly, "why, what do you mean?"

"Just that," said the agent. "I got a wire about fifteen minutes ago that there was a bad short circuit and block in the tunnels, and that they would not get things straightened out before the hour mentioned. It's kind of tough to have it come on a Saturday, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Bert faintly, "it is. Say, partner," he cried, an idea flashing into his mind, "let me send a telegram over your wire, will you? It is mighty important, and I'll gladly pay double—" He stopped short.

"Can't do it, Jack," said the agent, "it's against the rules of the company, and I'd get fired sure. Why don't you try the regular telegraph office, three blocks up Center Street?"

"I guess I will," said Bert vaguely, and went outside to lean against the wall and think.

Much good it did him!

He was absolutely cut off from communi-

cation with his home. Had he been cast in a dungeon underground he could not have been more effectually buried, and he cast his eyes about despondently upon the extremely new and rapidly becoming sodden beauty of Elmwood, the bright and modern suburb, which held him in his present predicament. No telephone, no trains, penniless, unknown, he was as helpless as if he were in the heart of Arabia.

After much evading, sliding, eluding, and attempting to dodge the issue, Bert Emerson came to the only remaining conclusion.

He must walk home.

It was five miles if it was a foot, and the rain was still pouring down with an early spring vigor that gave no promise of a let-up. A glance at the clouds showed a heavy, dark, and solidly leaden sky. A glance at his apparel brought a groan to his lips, for there in all beauty was a new light suit, and a Spring overcoat of the latest pattern. To venture into the rain meant their destruction.

But suddenly he felt guilty that he should let the thoughts of a suit and an overcoat intrude when only Myrtle should be in his mind. He put away the unworthy idea.

Buttoning his coat tightly, he raised his umbrella, and stepped boldly forth into the downpour, his many-folded trouser ends flapping wetly. The recollection of those five miles caused him to waver as a martyr might have wavered for the instant at the lion's distant roar, but it was for no longer a space. Squaring his shoulders and bending his head to the blast, he sogged along the country road that ran beside the railroad track.

"Perhaps, if I'm lucky," he said, "I may catch an auto or wagon that will give me a lift part of the way. But I don't believe it. My luck isn't taking that kind of a course, and what's more to the point, this isn't the main road or there wouldn't be such mud."

He shortly passed out of the limits of Elmwood into the open country. It didn't seem possible that within fifteen minutes' ride of New York a man would have to be actually pioneering as he was this afternoon.

As Emerson plodded along unhappily, he watched the gradual ruination of his clothes.

His new Oxford shoes became sieves, in and out of which ran streams of water and mud with every squelching step.

His trousers flapped dismally, and he shivered at the coldness of the water.

Fortunately, the umbrella shielded his head and body to some degree, but the greater part of his overcoat became a drizzling rag.

With maledictions in his heart he struggled and slipped and slapped along, dragging his feet from the sticky mud with more difficulty as he progressed.

Finally, through the slanting grayness ahead of him, he made out something standing in the road. A few minutes later it took form.

"An automobile!" he cried exultantly, and felt more life in him than at any time since he started. He hurried forward.

It was an open touring-car, and he recognized it as the make he sold, the Toreador. From under it projected the legs and feet of a man who, on his back was searching diligently for the cause that had stalled the machine, and standing miserably near-by under a tree were two women, soaked to the skin.

"Hallo there, under the car," yelled Bert cheerfully, "let me give you a hand. I guess I can fix her up."

"I wish to Heaven you would," cried the the man, worming himself out plastered with mud and grime. Bert advanced to the ladies.

"Here is an umbrella," he said cheerfully, "perhaps it will protect you to some degree."

It was taken from his hand eagerly. Returning to the car, he opened the hood and examined the machinery with an expert eye.

"Everything's all right here," he announced, and placing a tarpaulin on the ground squirmed his way underneath the car to inspect the driving mechanism. For fifteen minutes he pounded and tinkered and screwed, but without finding anything radically wrong.

"She's as sound as a fiddle," he said, dubiously emerging grimy and dilapidated from his position. "Let's start her."

He cranked viciously, and there was a hum of machinery as the spark caught. But only for a moment. With a sudden idea in his mind he went to the rear of the car and sounded the gasoline-tank with a pocket ruler.

"No wonder she wont go," he said disgustedly, "she hasn't a quart of gasoline in her. I guess you haven't owned your car very long, have you?"

"No," replied the man sheepishly, "and I never thought to look at the gasoline. But that isn't the worst. Those two women over

there are the girl I hope to marry and her mother. The old lady never was very strong for me anyway, but now! Oh, Lord!"

"Well, cheer up, old top, you aren't as badly off as I am," said Bert, suddenly remembering. "But I'll help you all I can. I'll leave my umbrella with the women. I've got three miles to go yet and no help in sight. So-long."

"Thanks, old man," replied the other despondently, "so-long."

Emerson plodded off into the storm without another word, heedless of its fury. Being in so wretched a state already, he did not care whether or not he had any protection, and felt he might as well take the bath graciously as in vain anger.

The incident of the auto out of his mind, his thoughts returned to the events that he imagined were transpiring at home, and he spurred his weary limbs to greater effort. But his progress was painfully slow. Then again the urgent and mysterious telephone message from Robbins returned to his mind. What could the man want? It must be a very grave matter.

By now the road was so clogged with mud and pools of water that his progress was more a sliding stagger than a walk, and he looked round him in vain exasperation for means of bettering it. On his right were the railroad tracks, and glancing along them he saw a little shanty not three hundred feet away from him.

An idea leaped into his mind and he hurried to the building.

With a cry of joy he found that the door, fastened by a crazy lock, would easily yield to his strength. Quickly he burst it open and entered. There, resting on wooden rails, newly-painted and dry, was a railroad lamp-lighter's tricycle.

"If this road can't run trains," he said to himself grimly, "at least they will provide this poor commuter with a means of transportation," and with his conscience hardened against the palpable theft, he wheeled the light-running vehicle over the crossing to the tracks. It required but a moment to lift it onto the rails, and in another he had grasped the handle and was pumping off toward Forest Lawns.

Very soon a disagreeable fact made itself manifest.

The railroad at this point consisted of four tracks, the two outer ones being paralleled by a dangerous third rail, while those in the middle, not being electrified, were used by the steam trains. As he went merrily along he realized that there were very few crossings. He had thoughtlessly put his tricycle on the right-hand track of the four, next to the third rail.

This fact was lost sight of presently in the joy he felt at the speed he was making. With very little effort he could send the light vehicle at eight miles an hour even in the teeth of the wind and rain, and his troubles seemed at last ended.

He had gone barely a mile when, through the storm, he heard the long-drawn whistle of an electric train behind him. He knew that it must be very near, coming as it did against the wind, and shivers of terror ran up and down his back. Storm and discomfort were forgotten in the mad effort to get off the track.

He realized that he could not stop the car and leap to safety leaving it stranded in front of the oncoming train. Such an action might result in a wreck and the loss of many lives. Nor could he hope to lift the tricycle bodily over the third rail. Should he attempt this, and any part of the machine touched the death-dealing steel—his thoughts went no farther.

Glancing quickly along the track he could see no crossing. The perspiration of fear added itself to the rain on his face as he bent with all his strength to the task of reaching a place for derailing the tricycle. He knew one must be near, for he had passed the last one at least half a mile back.

Again he heard the whistle of the approaching train, and knew it to be nearer. He was not sure that the motorman could see him yet, for the rain and mist were thick, but he knew that he had very little leeway.

Faster and faster the handle went back and forth under the pressure of his powerful muscles, and he could see the roadbed flow beneath him like a muddy stream.

With a jar he hit a wide curve, but the tricycle held the rails. Suddenly ahead of him he saw a team standing beside the track as if about to cross. A great joy rose in his heart. He might yet be in time. The hope lent him vitality and he plied his strength to the handle with renewed vigor.

Never had anything seemed to crawl as did that wretched tricycle. Where before it had appeared a marvel of lightness, trimness, and speed, it now seemed made of forged steel that had been welded to the track. He seemed scarcely to move.

The whistle that now sounded in his ears was one of alarm and warning. The motorman had evidently seen the scurrying object through the fog, and instantly, almost at his back it seemed, there was a sharp exhaust of air, a whistling, and the screech and grind of brakes.

But huge steel cars going at a rate of forty miles an hour are not stopped instantly at the pressure of a handle. Bert knew this, and though his eyes were closing with exhaustion, he pumped determinedly.

Now the crossing with the team standing upon it was only a hundred feet away.

Now he had reached it.

Throwing all his weight on the handbrake, Bert Emerson brought the thrashing little vehicle up short, and an instant later was behind it, tugging at the rear wheel, which is the heaviest. With a mighty heave he swung it at right angles to the track, and, by pulling, backed the machine onto the roadway just in time to see the red steel cars flash by, the wheels shrieking in the grip of the brakes.

But this was not all.

The road crossing had been raised to the level of the track in a steep incline, and when Bert had given the tricycle the initial impetus it continued to back down this embankment despite all his efforts. Weak with the protracted struggle against the approaching train, he could not resist the weight of the car, and went with it to the bottom, scratching and scrambling in the muck.

Both were uninjured.

It was something scarcely of human appearance that crawled painfully to a standing position beside the car, bedraggled, pathetic-looking, and miserable.

"Wal," drawled the yokel who had watched the whole proceeding unmoved from the seat of his manure wagon, "that was a clost call ye had. Get up, Bess!"

"Here, you, wait a minute!" cried Bert, angered despite his weariness. "I want help to get this joy-wagon back on the rails. Will you give us a hand?"

"For fifty cents," replied the other slowly.

"That's a go," replied Emerson promptly, and a few moments later he was again astride the tricycle.

"Hey, how about my money?" yelled the wagon-driver, as Bert did not show any signs of making payment.

"Let me tell you something, my friend," said Emerson solemnly. "I'm a lawyer, and you needn't think I didn't see you sit on that wagon without even making as much as a move to help me when I was in danger. Had I been injured, I could have got damages out of the company for the hurt, and out of you as an accessory to the fact, because you sat there like a piece of cheese, without an effort at help. Considering everything, I am willing to let that go, because you helped me with the car; but if I were you I wouldn't be too keen about collecting that fifty cents. See?"

The driver climbed back on his seat without a word and clucked to his horses, while Bert started off smiling, and gave a wink that included the whole of the surrounding country. He knew he was safe now, as there were no more trains out from the city, and his road was clear. Moreover, the rain had begun to slacken, and the grayness above grew lighter. Things appeared to be more propitious, and he picked up heart as he sped on.

He was almost there now. His troubles were over. He would at last find out whether or not the census had been added to, and what Elliot Robbins wanted. This day would finally right itself, and all would be happy—

Bing!

Out of the mist which still clung close to the ground, at a distance of not more than fifty feet, another tricycle seemed to swoop toward him on the same track.

But was it coming toward him, after all?

As he applied the brake again he realized that it was standing still, and, looking above his head, realized why. Extending across the four tracks, at a height of twenty-five or thirty feet, was a steel framework upon which the semaphores for signaling up and down each one were installed. On the framework he saw a man fitting a lantern into its position.

Looking ahead, he saw lanterns on the second tricycle, which was headed in the same direction as his own. There was but a moment to think, and there was but one thing to do. Should the lamp-lighter commence asking questions, Bert would land in jail shortly. He could not stop to lift his machine around the other.

Even now the man on the framework had started down the ladder.

Bringing his machine to a quick stop, Bert leaped like a madman to the seat of the other, swept the remaining lanterns to the ground with one hand, and threw his strength into making a start.

With a yell of surprise and rage the lamplighter scurried down the steel ladder, only to find a brand-new tricycle, instead of an old one, and a heap of lanterns on the ground.

The strange visitor who had "swapped" was lost in the mist.

Emerson did not relax his efforts until he saw dimly the loom of the Forest Lawns station. Alighting at a crossing, he again heaved the machine off the track, and let it run down the embankment into the bushes, where it would be easily seen by the section-gang. Now that he had accomplished his purpose, the guilt of the theft weighed upon him.

"I'll come back here as soon as I can and make this all right," he said stoutly; "and I guess I'll have to confess to Robbins. But I'm afraid his sense of moral rectitude won't let him excuse me, even if it was for Myrtle."

He walked on wearily into the little town and turned off into a side street near his own. His face was as black as that of a coal man, his garments were in tatters, his hands were scratched, and now for the first time he saw they were bleeding. Never had such an object been seen in Forest Lawns.

In support of this fact Bert soon had a retinue of small boys, who hooted and yelled at the "tramp." The wretched man broke into a run, and it was on the run that he mounted his own porch and entered his own front door, only to encounter his mother-in-law.

He kissed her dutifully.

The good lady, not recognizing her admirer, and overwrought with the day's events, gave one screech, and they called for the aromatic spirits of ammonia.

"This is your son, Bert Emerson, mother!" he cried, as his own mother ran into the room where he sat holding the unconscious lady in his grimy paws.

"Tell me what has happened—is Myrtle all right? Is there anything to tell? Oh, if you knew what I have been through trying to get here! And all because I wasn't allowed to stay right in this house where I should have been."

"Bert," said his mother, "in your case blessings did not come singly."

"What do I draw?" he asked, prepared for the worst.

"A king and a queen to make a full house," replied his mother in the vernacular of the seven-handed game.

"Ha!" he laughed joyously. "Now I will call up Robbins. But tell me how Myrtle is, and the ki—children. When may I see them?"

"As soon as you have washed yourself so you won't scare them to death."

An hour later Bert Emerson stood at the telephone.

"Hallo, Robbins, old chap! How goes the world with you? I've had the very deuce of a time getting you on the phone since my office received your call this morning; but here we are at last, and now you can tell me all about this all-important business."

"I only wanted to say," came the voice of Robbins, "that you owe me a silk hat."

"What for?" demanded Emerson disappointedly.

"Do you remember that bet we had in college that the first one to add to the population was to receive a tile at the hands of the other?"

"Ye-e-s," said Emerson slowly, memory reawaking.

"Well, my size is seven and one-half, and I'm not particular about the make."

"Yes; but who are the three people who were in serious conference?"

"My wife, the doctor, and myself."

"Look here, Robbins," said Bert calmly, "that wasn't all the bet, was it?"

"No, indeed. The first one of us to be presented with twins or more was to receive from the other one hundred dollars for each kid, to start a bank account."

"In that case," said Bert, "you have my address, and can send around the two hundred dollars any time. Moreover, I am not particular about the kind of currency."

THE MIRACLE.

CLOSE-HUNG with silence was the darkened room;
Through starlit distances there came to earth
A thread from off God's never-ceasing loom;
To mortals known—the miracle of birth!

Edwin Carlile Litsey.

The Hat in the Box.

BY CHARLES CAREY.

Millinery Maneuvers in the Avenue Add Greatly to the Gaiety of Nations, Including the Irish, the French, the American, the Belgian, and the African.

CHAPTER I.

BY SPECIAL MESSENGER.

"NO mistakes—no disappointments!"

That was the motto at Fadette's; and Fadette herself — in private life Mrs. Bridget Mahoney—stood by it with all the Hibernian devotion to a creed.

At Fadette's, goods had to go out when ordered, and they had to go right. Excuses were taboo. Let the head trimmer elope with an Omaha pork-packer; let the wholesale house fail to deliver an order of aigrets; let an epidemic of grip or marriage sweep the sewing-rooms; let the heavens fall! It made no difference to Fadette.

"No mistakes — no disappointments!" She nailed her colors to the masthead, and somehow she managed to get away with it.

Consequently, the excitement which reigned in the establishment at five o'clock on a November afternoon when Miss Alma Van Buskirk telephoned in that the hat she was to wear at the Horse Show that night had not arrived, may be imagined, rather than described.

Neither was it as if just an ordinary hat for an ordinary person had failed to turn up.

That would have been bad enough, of course, at a place like Fadette's, where there were "no mistakes and no disappointments." But to have it happen with the hat which Miss Alma Van Buskirk was to wear at the Horse Show! Ah, my countrymen, there was a black calamity!

Surely, it never rains but it pours.

In the whole New York peach-orchard Miss Alma was the prime specimen of that season's crop, or, indeed, of many seasons' crop—as peachy a peach as could well be pictured, sun-ripened, hand-picked, carefully wrapped up, with a complexion like roses, blue eyes and golden hair, and a smile that set your heart-strings quivering delectably, no matter whether you were sixteen or sixty.

As an added attraction, she was the daughter of old Freeman Van Buskirk, one of the leading "malefactors of great wealth"; but in strict justice it must be granted—so wholly desirable was she—that her money didn't really count except with a few inveterate fortune-hunters who didn't count with her.

Least of all, did the money count with Tom Schuyler, who was "pretty well heeled" himself, and who, despite a lovers' quarrel, had by no means lost hope of—

But that will come out later. For the present our concern must be with Fadette and the hat for the Horse Show.

It had been a rush order. Indeed, had it been wanted by any less notable a personage than Miss Alma Van Buskirk, Fadette would have refused even to consider the proposition.

But, in the face of a temptation like that, she hesitated. Outside of the staggering price she could demand—and Fadette had shrewdly gained her millinery preeminence chiefly by charging more than anybody else; people are always satisfied, she used to say, if they are made to pay big—there was the advertisement to be reaped.

Miss Van Buskirk was sure to attract more attention than any other feature of the Horse Show, or all of them put together. Every one would turn to look at her. Not a woman there would fail to note each de-

tail of her costume, and, with unerring feminine discernment, remark: "The hat is from Fadette's!"

All the fashion-writers and visiting dressmakers would "rubber" their heads off, and the following morning's papers would unquestionably give the toilet at the head of their list, perhaps even mention it in the head-lines.

As a publicity promoter, it would leave in the shade the "Hats by Fadette" line on the program of the most popular and showy musical comedy ever presented.

These various incentives flashed through Fadette's modishly-coiffed red head as she gazed into Miss Van Buskirk's pleading, flower-like face; then she brought her teeth together in a decisive snap.

"It shall be done," she said. "The hat will be ready for you."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, *madame!*" Alma clapped her gloved hands together in relief. "You are quite sure you will not fail me?"

Fadette smiled loftily.

"I have promised, *mademoiselle.* We have no mistakes here, and no disappointments, either."

Then, ushering her customer out of the green-and-gold reception-room, she turned to the workrooms to give swift, Napoleonic orders.

From department to department she watched with her own eye that hat as it grew from shapeless wire and chiffon to the finished creation.

Constantly she urged speed, speed; yet permitted no scamping or loose stitches. The girls worked like possessed, nimble fingers, flying under the stimulus of her overseeing. The trimmer surpassed herself as Fadette murmured an intelligent criticism or gave a word of appreciation.

So at last the thing was done. Fadette held it poised on her hand for a moment to admire its graceful proportions and *chic* "Frenchiness."

"Ah," she exclaimed, "it is the best thing we ever turned out of the shop!"

But there was no time to waste in artistic transports. Already the short November day was fading into dusk, and the lights were beginning to come out along the avenue.

With her own hands Fadette placed the hat in its tissue-paper lined box and tied the strings; then, having summoned the gorgeously-uniformed, ebony-faced delivery-boy, set the box herself in the receptacle on the front of his motor-cycle — a tin case made in imitation of a monster hat-box and bearing the familiar inscription, "Fadette," which was her trade-mark, across its front.

"No loitering or stopping for any reason, Julius," she enjoined sternly. "I want this delivered without a moment's delay."

"Yas'm." Julius nodded comprehension, and, springing to his saddle, was off.

Fadette, from the doorway of her establishment, watched his progress until he was lost to view in the press of the avenue's traffic; then she stepped inside and, noting that it was five o'clock and closing-time, gave the order to shut down.

The sewing-girls trooped out, chattering and laughing; the saleswomen followed, and lastly the heads of the departments also went.

Finally Fadette was left alone in the place, except for the scrub-women and cleaners-up.

She sat at her desk, busily going over her accounts and closing up the day's business; for she, too, was anxious to get away. She was also going to the Horse Show that night.

Just a moment she pondered, biting her pen, as she came to the Van Buskirk entry; but ended by putting it down at eight hundred dollars, and, closing the book, started to put on her hat and furs.

As she arranged her veil, however, the sharp jangle of the telephone-bell recalled her to her desk, and somewhat impatiently she snatched up the instrument.

An excited feminine voice hailed her shrilly over the wire.

"This is Miss Van Buskirk," it said. "Why haven't you sent my hat?"

Fadette muttered to herself an objurgation against the dilatory Julius; but there was no hint of this in the honeyed tones with which she responded to her customer.

"Have no fear, my dear Miss Van Buskirk," she said. "It is already on the way to you. Indeed, the messenger should be there by this time."

But the soothing assurance failed to carry relief.

"The messenger has been here," came the agitated reply, "and he didn't leave my hat."

"Didn't leave your hat?"

Fadette turned pale and almost dropped the receiver. Could that stupid Julius in some way have lost his burden?

"No; there has been a terrible mistake of some kind."

"Impossible. We make no mistakes, and I—"

"But I tell you there has been a mistake," interrupted Alma; "an awful blunder. The boy didn't leave my hat, but some other one."

"Ah!" Fadette gathered together her wits and breathed easier.

This was merely a case of a capricious beauty failing to find herself pleased with the goods she had ordered.

"No, no," she said sternly, "that is your hat, all right, Miss Van Buskirk, finished exactly according to the design you selected. I am sorry if it does not please you; but I could not think of making any changes or alterations now."

"Changes or alterations! I should think not!" Alma's voice was quivering with indignation. "Why, the thing couldn't possibly be fixed so that I would wear it. It is a fright, a nightmare!"

"Exactly according to your design," again insisted Fadette.

"According to my design? How can you sit there and say such a thing to me? Did I order red and green roses, with a big purple *chou* like a cabbage on the side?"

"Red and green roses!" gasped Fadette, scarcely able to believe her ears.

"Certainly."

"And a purple *chou?*"

"Yes; didn't I tell you that the hat is a nightmare?"

Fadette dazedly lifted her free hand to her brow.

"You are right, *mademoiselle,*" she said faintly. "There has been a mistake — a dreadful mistake. But do not permit yourself to get worried or upset over it. The matter shall be rectified without delay."

She hung up the receiver and leaned back in her chair, her head in a whirl.

Green and red roses and a purple *chou!* And the creation she had sent was composed of French brocade, rare old lace, and bird-of-paradise feathers.

How could such a ghastly, incomprehensible mistake have occurred? There was no opportunity for a shift in orders; for, in the first place, Fadette would never have turned out a hat with green and red roses and a purple *chou;* and, secondly, Julius had had but the one delivery to make.

The only possible explanation, therefore, was that her messenger had either wilfully done this thing from dishonesty or revenge; or else that, tarrying by the way, he had permitted some one to tamper with his precious burden.

In any event, it was plainly up to Julius; and as she reflected on this fact, Fadette's "Irish" flamed into white-hot fury.

"Just wait till I get my hands on that coon!" she muttered ominously. "I'll break every bone in his body!"

CHAPTER II.

CONFRONTED WITH THE EVIDENCE.

MEANWHILE, Julius was *chug-chugging* placidly back to the shop on his motor-cycle, serene in the consciousness of a duty faithfully performed.

Fadette's suspicions wronged Julius. He had proceeded direct to his destination without stop or adventure of any kind, and had handed in his parcel at the door to Miss Van Buskirk's maid, hearing, as he turned away, the girl's mistress call over the banister:

"Is that my hat from Fadette's, Marie? Then bring it right up, please."

True, on his return trip he had made a digression at Fifty-Third Street to cross over several blocks to the westward; but what of that?

He knew that the Van Buskirk delivery was the last he would have to make that day; and, since he had to go back to the shop only to put up his motor-cycle and doff his uniform, it made small difference when he put in an appearance.

Consequently, he took advantage of the opportunity to call upon a certain dusky Juliet residing over near Eighth Avenue and ask her to share with him a couple of theater tickets which a popular actress had handed out to him as a *douceur* that very afternoon.

If he lingered a little unduly upon his errand, who can blame him?

At last, however, he managed to tear himself away, and, dreaming of his charmer and the pleasure in store for him that evening, headed leisurely back toward Fadette's.

His conscience clear as a bell, the last thing he expected was a reprimand at the shop, or even to find his employer there at so late an hour.

His amazement may consequently be surmised when, on dismounting at the door of

the establishment, he found himself seized, yanked inside, and slammed up against the wall, while his mistress, like a red-headed tigress, fire flashing from her green eyes, cuffed him over the ears and plied him with hysterical questions.

Every moment of that dalliance over by Eighth Avenue had but added to Fadette's mounting ire, and when she finally laid hands on him, she let herself go to the limit.

Julius's befrogged and braided crimson jacket was torn in the scuffle, his face scratched by her pointed nails, and a generous portion of wool detached from his scalp, before he could sufficiently recover his faculties to defend himself.

All the time she kept furiously demanding of him:

"What did you do with that hat, you worthless, lazy, trifling scamp?"

"W'at hat yo' all talkin' erbout?" he finally managed to interpose, warding off her blows with uplifted arm.

"What hat, indeed? Well, of all the impudence! You know fast enough what hat I am talking about. And you'd better tell me, too, what you've done with it, or I won't leave as much as a grease spot of you. What hat, you ask? Oh, my word!"

Her feelings overcoming her, she made another dash at him of so savage a character that it bade fair to carry out her threat of total demolition.

Happily for poor Julius, cowering before the onset, however, there came an interruption at that moment.

The door was flung open, and in swept Miss Van Buskirk, followed by her maid bearing a hat-box which the boy immediately recognized as the identical one he had shortly before delivered up the avenue.

Alma, unable to wait patiently for the promised correction of the mistake, but determined to get hold of her hat, if in any way humanly possible, had taken a taxicab and come down to the establishment in person.

At the sight of the girl, Fadette promptly released her hold upon her unfortunate victim, and making an effort at composure, rustled across the floor.

"Oh, my dear Miss Van Buskirk," she cried, "I cannot apologize too deeply for this miserable *faux pas*. I do not fully understand as yet myself how such a thing could have happened; but I am getting at the facts, and I hope very speedily to—"

She paused, stricken speechless; for at that instant the maid, who had busied herself in untying the box, lifted out and displayed the "nightmare."

No wonder Fadette quailed and grew dumb before that spectacle. Grand Street on Easter Sunday never saw such a misconception of bad taste, such a monstrous riot of discordant colors.

The hat shrieked aloud—nay, it fairly bellowed in its red and green and purple infamy. A thing of cheap straw, and cheaper workmanship, it possessed not one redeeming feature.

An insane chimpanzee in the wilds of Central Africa might have deigned to wear it; no other female thing on the face of the globe would have been caught dead with it upon her head.

Fadette tottered weakly to a chair and hid her face in her hands.

"And to think," she moaned, "that that"—pointing at it—"*that* arrived in a box bearing my name. It is nothing short of a desecration!"

Julius, also, having seen the original hat put into the box, stared incredulously at this monstrosity.

"Whah'd dat come f'om?" he exclaimed, his eyes almost popping from his head.

Hapless remark. It recalled to him the wandering attention of his employer.

"Where did it come from?" she repeated, descending on him in another and even more vindictive attack. "That is just what we want you to tell us, you black scalawag—where it came from, and what you did with the beautiful hat I made for Miss Van Buskirk. Come; don't stand there and shake your head at me. I want the truth out of you, and I want it mighty quick."

Julius could only roll his eyes helplessly, as he began to grasp the nature of the accusation against him.

"Fo' de Lawd, missis," he stammered, "I swah I nebber seen dat ar red an' green hat afore!"

"What?" demanded Alma sharply. "Do you mean to say that isn't the hat you delivered at my house?"

Julius scratched his head. He knew who Miss Van Buskirk was, and realized that it might not be discreet to take issue with her on the question of veracity.

"I don't know nuffin' 'bout dat," he rejoined stubbornly. "All I says is dat I took de box w'at missis here give me, an' I went straight up to youah house an' handed it in.

"And dat," he added solemnly, "I sticks to wid my dyin' breff."

"What?" shrieked Fadette in turn. "Do you mean to insinuate, you miserable, lying scoundrel, that this is the hat I sent you out with?"

Poor Julius was between Scylla and Charybdis. He could neither assert on the one hand that he had delivered the right hat for fear of offending Miss Van Buskirk, nor, on the other, that this must be the hat given him, for fear of arousing further the rancor of his mistress.

In his dilemma, he turned for refuge to the supernatural.

"Mebbe," he said, with a bright inspiration, "mebbe somebody conjured dat ar hat while it was on de road, an' changed it right in de box."

"Humph!" sniffed Fadette scornfully. "I guess we know who did the conjuring, all right. Now, for the last time, are you going to tell me what is at the bottom of all this, and why you made away with Miss Van Buskirk's hat, or shall I have to send for a policeman?"

"I can't tell yo' nuffin' more'n I has," Julius whimpered. "I took de hat you give me, an' went straight up to—"

But the milliner cut him short with an impatient gesture, and stepping to the telephone, called up the nearest police station.

Hearing the request for an officer, and realizing that the case looked black against him, Julius suddenly decided to make a dash for liberty.

While Fadette was busy at the telephone, he sidled furtively nearer and nearer to the door, and now, as she arose, darted at full speed for the outside.

Instantly she divined his purpose, and gathering up her skirts, was after him.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" she screeched at the top of her lungs.

CHAPTER III.

"JUST PASSING BY."

JULIUS'S attempt at a get-away proved, however, to be short-lived.

As he sped through the door, a tall young man in evening dress, who had been standing outside peering in rather interestedly through the window, stepped quickly forward and, interposing an obstructive foot to the lad's flight, brought him sprawling to the sidewalk.

Then, leaning over and fastening a firm grip on his victim's collar, he jerked him to his feet, and turned to meet the wildly shrieking milliner.

"This is the fellow you want, I think, madam." He bowed. "Shall I bring him inside for you?"

"Oh, if you will be so good," exclaimed Fadette gratefully. "And would it be asking too much for you to stay and guard him a few minutes until the officer gets here? We are three women all alone, and he has evidently become desperate, now that he sees his game is up."

"Asking too much? Not at all," the stranger assured her. "I shall be glad to be of service."

Accordingly, with Fadette leading the way, and the young man shoving his prisoner before him, the three reentered the establishment.

Miss Van Buskirk, still standing to one side with her maid, glanced up interestedly; then her eyes widened, and she went pale and red almost in a single breath.

The maid caught quickly at her hand.

"Eet ees Mistair Schuyler!" she whispered excitedly.

This was hardly information to Alma. Endowed with average eyesight, one cannot well fail to recognize the man to whom one has been engaged up to a fortnight before.

One may break with him, and resolve to tear his image from one's heart; but it is hardly necessary to have a Bertillon identification to tell who he is when he stands before you.

Small wonder, then, that she blushed and grew confused at his unexpected appearance. Of course, he was no longer anything to her—so little, indeed, that this hat over which the fuss was being made and the elaborate costume to go with it had been designed for the especial purpose of showing him how slightly she had been affected by their rupture.

She had planned to go to the Horse Show that night with Davis Blaine, Schuyler's particular *bête noire,* and the chap against whom he had persistently warned her, and to be the best-gowned and most radiant woman there, just to convince him and all the rest of the world that she was not fretting her heart out.

Yes, she had intended to laugh, and flirt, and enjoy herself, and never give even so much as a glance to Tom Schuyler, and

then—as she well knew, go home and sob herself miserably to sleep.

And now by unexpectedly popping up in this fashion, he had completely spoiled her interesting program. It was really most disconcerting.

It was impossible, too, for her to fail to speak to him. It would simply serve to make the situation even more embarrassing, and give Fadette a nice little titbit of gossip to whisper about among her customers on the morrow.

Therefore, she gave a stiff, little nod in his direction, and murmured a frosty "Mr. Schuyler," with a slightly rising inflection.

"Yes, I happened to be passing," he explained equably, if a trifle mendaciously, for, as already mentioned, he had been standing with his nose glued to the pane for the last five minutes, and, indeed, had followed Alma thither all the way from her home. "I happened to be passing, and hearing the outcry, was able to intercept and nab this young rascal just as he came out.

"By the way," he turned inquiringly to the milliner, "what's he been up to?"

Fadette waved her hand in a tragic gesture toward the creation of green and red roses.

"That!" she said.

Schuyler gave a little start, instantly suppressed, as his eye followed her grimly pointing finger; then his face broke into a mirthful smile.

"Well," he commented, "it's bad, I'll admit; but not exactly a crime, eh?"

"Not a crime?" repeated Fadette emphatically. "It should be a hanging matter.

"However," she went on, "it's not that I'm having him arrested for. It's for stealing or making away with a perfectly lovely hat I trimmed for Miss Van Buskirk, and trying to palm off this outrage in its place."

"But why?" Tom looked puzzled. "What possible motive could he have had?"

Fadette shrugged her shoulders.

"Natural viciousness, I suppose. Or, maybe," another solution striking her, "he was paid to do it."

"Paid to do it?"

"Yes; by some one who was jealous or envious of Miss Van Buskirk's beauty, or who wanted to keep her away from the Horse Show this evening."

At this latter suggestion Alma glanced quickly up, and seemed to see a new light upon the subject. She took a hasty step forward, and half-opened her lips to speak.

But Julius himself took occasion to deny vigorously any betrayal of his trust.

"Nobody nebber done paid me nuffin'," he protested hotly. "Ef dem hats wuz switched, 'twuz done by sperits or conjurin', I tells you. I lef' dis sto'"—dropping into his familiar recital—"an' I went right straight up dere widout stoppin' or speakin' to nobody.

"Den I takes de box out'n de case on my cycle, an' I rings de bell, an' dat gal dere"—with a nod of his head at Marie—"comes to de do', an' she takes de hat f'om me."

Schuyler's eyes narrowed slightly.

"And is that all you know?" he queried.

"Yes, suh; dat's all, 'cept'n dat de lady hollered f'om up-stairs, axin' if dat wuz her hat, and tellin' de gal to done bring it up."

"And then you came right back here again, I suppose?" probed Schuyler.

"Yes, suh."

There was a note of hesitation, however, which did not escape the examiner's keen ear.

"What?" he demanded sharply.

Julius shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Well, suh," he admitted at last, "mebbe I did drap off fo' a matter of fo' or five minutes to see a lady fren' o' mine."

"Ah!" shrilled Fadette triumphantly. "I thought so. Only it was on the way to Miss Van Buskirk's that you stopped, instead of coming back, and that hussy now has—"

But Schuyler silenced her with a slight gesture of annoyance.

"If you will let me have a few moments' private conversation with this boy, madam," he said, "I think I shall be able to get at the truth. It is impossible to accomplish anything here where every one is interrupting."

Fadette accepted the rebuke with becoming meekness. After all, this masterful young man had been able to elicit more from Julius than she had succeeded in doing, and her chief concern, of course, was to recover the missing hat.

"As you wish," she said, with a wave of her hand, as though to signify that she eliminated herself from the situation.

Schuyler grasped his prisoner by the arm and drew him a little aside over into a corner near the door.

Strangely enough, though, he did not enter upon a cross-examination of Julius, but, bending over, merely whispered:

"You stick to that story of yours through thick and thin, and I'll see that no harm comes to you on account of it. Don't let them scare you, or bluff you, and don't mind if they even go so far as to arrest you. Remember, I'm behind you, and I'll manage so as to get you out of the scrape all right.

"And here," he added, displaying, folded up in his palm, a yellow-backed bill, the sight of which almost caused Julius's eyes to pop out of his head, "here is something to repay you for your trouble."

He slid his hand forward as he spoke, transferring the money; but as Julius deftly pocketed it with a murmured, "Thank yo', suh," Schuyler was startled by a slight cough behind him.

Turning sharply, he found fixed upon him the eyes of the detective from the station-house, who had entered softly and unnoticed during the colloquy between him and the boy.

How long had the fellow been there, Tom wondered; and how much had he seen?

Furthermore, if he had neither seen nor heard anything, what did he suspect?

CHAPTER IV.

A PROFESSIONAL AT WORK.

IF Schuyler was rattled by the appearance of the detective behind him, he didn't show it.

Beyond that one slight start, his manner was the embodiment of ease and unconcern.

"Ah," he said, nodding affably, "I have met you somewhere before, haven't I?"

"Yes," assented the man; "twice. At your sister's wedding, where I was detailed to guard the presents, and another time about two years before, when I was on the bicycle squad."

"I remember," Tom laughed. "It was for speeding up on Riverside Drive; they soaked me twenty-five dollars and costs.

"However," he added, "we meet this time neither on the social plane, nor"—with just the hint of a sidewise glance—"as prisoner and captor."

"No?" observed the sleuth impassively.

"No," repeated Tom. "We are, instead, fellow-investigators of a dark mystery, in which this boy very fittingly is the ostensible dark culprit."

The detective gave a little frown of impatience at so much raillery.

"Let's get down to business," he said shortly. "They sent for a man to come over here. What's the answer?"

"Better get it first hand, I guess," counseled Schuyler. "Come this way."

He nodded his head toward a side room, into which the milliner had retired with Miss Van Buskirk and the maid, and led the way thither, still keeping a firm grip on Julius's collar.

"You have made him tell?" Fadette jumped up from her chair, as the procession entered.

"No." Tom shook his head. "And I am going to turn over my job. 'When the gods arrive, the half-gods go.' This"—indicating the stocky figure in his wake—"is Detective Brady."

The plain-clothes man promptly stepped forward.

"And now, madam," he said, "since I haven't got all month to spend on this job, will you tell me what this fuss is about?"

"Why, hasn't Mr. Schuyler explained?" she cried. "Well, it's simply this. That black scoundrel there"—casting a baleful glance at Julius—"stole an eight hund—stole a very valuable hat which I had given him to deliver to Miss Van Buskirk. He passed it over to a black sweetheart of his, and substituted—"

"Heah!" broke in Julius excitedly. "Don't go ringin' no innocent folkses' names into dis heah. My fren' is a puffeck lady, I tells yo'. 'Sides, she ain't brack; she's yaller."

"Objection sustained," agreed Schuyler judicially. "It remains yet to be proven that the sweetheart—whatever her shade—is in any way involved. In fact, Julius asserts that he did not see her until after the delivery of the hat."

"Dat's right," affirmed the prisoner. "I took de hat w'at de missis giv' me, an' I went right straight up de av'noo to de house, an' rings de bell, an'—"

Fadette gave an angry flounce.

"Well, all I've got to say," she interrupted, "is, where did he get such a thing as that, if it wasn't from this girl of his?"

The detective following the contemptuous wave of her hand toward the red, green, and purple monstrosity, stepped over to give it a critical inspection.

"No." He shook his head, after thoughtfully studying it a minute or two. "I guess we can safely leave the sweetheart out of any connection with the job.

"Why, I leave it to you, yourself, ma'am." He turned to Fadette. "Would any girl—black, tan, pink, or saddle-color—ever buy a 'Italian sunset' like that?"

"No," she was forced to admit; "at least, none that I ever met."

"Sure not," he agreed; "and none that anybody else ever had anything to do with. Why, an Indian squaw would balk and throw back her ears at the sight of it.

"No," he went on. "I'm not only a married man myself, but I've had considerable experience with the sex, being formerly at the silk counter at Nunnemaker's; and you can take it from me that no woman ever bought that.

"It's the kind of thing they make up in shops on the off-streets to sell to men—fellows who want to surprise their girls, you know; or, more especially, drunks on their way home, and looking for something to square it up with their wives. A drunk would pick a lid like the one yonder, nine times out of ten."

Young Mr. Schuyler made no comment; but a close observer could hardly have failed to note the swift wave of color which swept up over his face and neck.

"Now, I wonder why he should go red and start to twiddling his fingers over a statement like that?" was the reflection of the astute Mr. Brady.

No suggestion of any such speculation, however, appeared in his blank, and rather bored expression. Indeed, one would have said he was paying no attention to Tom at all, as he went right on addressing himself to Fadette.

Skilfully he questioned her, shunting her away from the side-lines of discourse, toward which she constantly tended, and holding her straight to the track until he had got all she knew.

Then, in like manner, he interrogated Julius, Miss Van Buskirk, and the maid.

Julius, becoming perfect through practice, glibly rattled off his, "I took de hat w'at de misses give me, an' I went right straight up de ave'noo," without so much as the change of a word.

Miss Van Buskirk and the maid corroborated him so far as their knowledge went, but could, of course, only testify concerning the reception of the parcel.

The former said that, hearing the doorbell ring, and suspecting it to be the arrival of the hat for which she was so eagerly waiting, she had sent her maid down to answer; and then listening at the head of the banister, had called: "Is that my hat from Fadette's, Marie? Then bring it right up, please."

The girl had done so without delay, she continued, and she herself had opened the box, to find within the wretched surprise awaiting her.

"You say that you opened the box?" repeated Brady. "Now, tell me, were the strings on it tied or not, when it came into your hands?"

But after an attempt at recollection, she was obliged to confess that she did not know. Her impatience to see the hat had been so great, she explained, that she could not now recall just how she removed the box-lid.

"Well, then," proceeded the detective, taking another tack, "how long did it require for the girl to get to you with the box after she answered the bell?"

"How long? Oh, no time at all. Just about as long as it would take one to cross a hall and mount a pair of stairs, if one were in a hurry."

A sudden indignant flash came to Alma's blue eyes, and her lip curled scornfully, as she caught the drift of his questions.

"Do I understand that you are trying to throw suspicion on Marie?" she demanded. "If so, you are wofully wasting your time; for, in the first place, I have had her with me ten years, and am absolutely certain of her honesty, and, secondly, she could have had no motive. If she wanted the hat, she knew that it would fall to her as soon as I had worn it once or twice."

Brady nodded, as though to signify that her statements merely confirmed his own views.

"I was merely trying to cover all possible contingencies," he observed; "and along the same line, I am going to ask you a question or two which you may consider impertinent. Why were you on such a jump to get that hat?"

"Because I wanted it to match a costume I intended wearing to the Horse Show tonight."

"Ah, the Horse Show, eh? And were you going there with any one in particular?"

"Yes."

Just the single monosyllable; no more.

Brady was conscious that she desired the inquiry to end there; but he scented a development, and pressed on.

"Who was it, may I ask?"

Miss Van Buskirk hesitated an instant, glancing out of the corner of her eye toward where Schuyler sat beside a little table to the right of the detective; then she defiantly threw back her head.

"It was Mr. Davis Blaine."

Crash!

A couple of tumblers and a *carafé* which had stood on the stand at Schuyler's elbow went hurtling to the floor in a jingle of broken glass.

Looking over quickly, the detective saw that the young man's face was black as midnight.

CHAPTER V.

UNCOVERING THE ROMANCE.

AS a matter of fact, Brady seemed a little taken aback himself at the girl's answer.

"Mr. Davis Blaine?" he repeated, his eyes narrowing. "Not the young Mr. Blaine who is president of the Algonquin Savings Bank?"

"Certainly," she responded coldly. "That is the only Mr. Blaine I know of who is in society."

"Yes, I suppose so."

That didn't appear to be just what the detective had started to say. Indeed, one would almost have sworn that something radically different had been trembling on the tip of his tongue.

But, if so, he did not voice it. Instead, after one or two further questions of an indifferent character, he asked both Schuyler and Miss Van Buskirk to leave the room, and suggested that the former take Julius with him.

"I think, if you don't mind," he said, "that I should like to have the maid all to myself while I am questioning her."

Accordingly they withdrew, both a shade reluctantly perhaps, and joined Fadette where she sat frowning without, and expressing her contemptuous opinion of the police force of New York in general, and of the specimen now quartered on her in particular.

"Detective!" she sniffed disdainfully. "Why, he couldn't detect beans! What's the use of all this fol-de-rol, anyhow? If he really wants to recover the hat, let him go after that wench up on Fifty-Third Street, and take it away from her. I'll bet if I shook a ten-dollar bill under his nose he'd—"

"Heah!" Julius flared up in alarm. "Don't you go to bribin' no cops, or I'll have you pinched, suah. 'Sides, I done tole you to leave dat lady's name out'n dis discussion, an' ef you don't quit it, I'se likely to lose my tempeh an' frow somep'n!"

It required all of Schuyler's diplomacy to calm down the bickering pair and restrain them from active hostilities.

Meanwhile, Brady was busy with Marie; yet, strangely enough, he didn't seem to touch on anything which might not have been heard by all the world.

Perfunctorily, he brought forth her story of the box's delivery, and found it to coincide almost exactly with that already told by her mistress.

She had answered the bell at Miss Van Buskirk's order, she said, and had taken in the box and signed for it. Then, upon the young lady's request, called over the banister, she took the hat to her without delay.

Had she stopped at all on the way?

She had not.

Had there been any one else in the hall at the time?

"No," she answered quickly. Just a shade too quickly, Brady thought; but he made no attempt to challenge her denial.

Instead, he dropped back to such a trivial question as how many servants there were in the house, causing her to name them all, from the butler to the scullery maid.

Possibly Fadette was right, after all, when she said that he was a pretty poor excuse for a detective.

It was only when he had finished, and told Marie that she might go, that he betrayed the slightest interest in his task, or gave a hint of what was up his sleeve when he asked the others to leave the room.

"Oh, by the way," he called the girl back from the door, "Mr. Davis Blaine calls there at the house quite often, does he not?"

"He comes sometimes."

Her tone was guarded, but Brady had not lost the quick curl of her lip at his mention of the name.

"Nice sort of a chap, don't you think?"

Her only answer was a toss of the head.

"Well, at any rate," he pursued, "he seems to be cutting Schuyler out most effectively."

She leaned forward quickly.

"W'at make you say zat, *m'sieu?*"

"Why, don't it look like it? Here, a few months ago, she and Schuyler were everywhere together. I remember, at his sister's wedding, everybody was joking about them being the next lucky pair. Yet, to-night she's turning things upside down because she can't cut the dash she wants to at the Horse Show with Blaine."

"*Pouf!*" Marie gave a characteristic Gallic shrug. "What zat amount to? Zat joost to make M'sieu Tom jealous. She lofe him, I tell you. I know. I hear her sob, sob, every night after she go to bed. I see her sit wiz her hands folded an' joost t'ink. *Oui,* she lofe him, an' he lofe her. But zey quarrel; so she encourage zis *cochon* Blaine, to make M'sieu Tom feel bad. *Que voulez vous?* Eet ees zee woman's way."

"Then you think everything will come out all right in the end, eh?"

"Eet mus'!" emphatically. "Zat is," realizing perhaps that she was talking too freely, "I trus' so. I pray every night zat zey make up."

"Well, keep up the good work," laughed Brady. "And don't forget that Providence helps those who help themselves. Perhaps, if you try, you can nudge the game along a little."

With that he closed the interview, and returned with the girl to the little coterie waiting outside.

"Well, coon," he addressed Julius gruffly, "why don't you give in and make a clean breast of it? The facts are dead against you."

"De fac's, suh?" tremblingly.

"Certainly. You yourself admit, don't you, that you saw the right hat placed in its box and handed over to you?"

"Yas, suh."

"Then you have heard what Miss Van Buskirk and the maid say about the reception of the box at the other end of the line? You don't accuse either of them of making the substitution, I suppose?"

"No, suh; but—"

"But, what? Have you any rational explanation to account for the change of hats inside a locked case on the road between here and Mr. Van Buskirk's, if you were attending to your business?"

Julius, confronted with this array of logic, could only fall back on his old solution and murmur, "Sperits."

"Anyhow, it wuzn't me," he insisted, glaring desperately around at the ring of skeptical faces. "I 'clare I'se innercent. Me nor my lady fr'en', we neider one on us hadn't nuffin' to do wif it."

The boy's passionate assertion had a ring of sincerity in it which was unmistakable.

Alma stepped quickly forward and faced the detective.

"Don't condemn him too quickly!" she cried. "I believe he is speaking the truth, and if so, impossible as it appears, the exchange must have occurred at my home. Let us go there and look, anyway," she suggested. "There may be some clue or explanation to the affair there which Marie and I, in our excitement, overlooked.

"Come." She started toward the door. "I have a motor waiting outside."

"But will it hold us all?" objected the detective. "Wait, and I will telephone for a taxicab."

"No need of that, old man," interposed Schuyler. "I came here in one. It is at the door."

Alma turned at this admission, and stared at him with frankly uplifted brows.

"I thought," she said, "that you told us you merely happened to be passing by."

If there had been butter sauce handy, Schuyler could have been served at that moment as fresh broiled lobster.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CUP OF TANTALUS.

TOM gulped and stammered in his confusion.

"Er—that is—why—you see," he floundered; and Alma really seemed to enjoy his misery. The cold and haughty air which she maintained toward him at first had by this time given way to a sort of playful mockery.

There was a mischievous, teasing spirit in the glance with which she regarded him, but certainly not aversion.

At last, though, a bright idea struck through the fog in which he was enveloped.

"Oh, I say," he exclaimed, "you catch a fellow up so quick that for a minute he can't tell whether he is on his head or his heels.

"The how of it was this," with dogged insistence. "I was coming along here in a taxicab on my way to the club; but the traffic cop held us up so long, to let a lot of

wagons cross the avenue, that I got tired and decided to walk.

"So I hopped out and was passing by here, as I told you, when Julius came dashing out of the door and cannoned into me."

"But, how, then, does your taxicab happen to be waiting for you outside?" demanded the girl skeptically. "I should think the chauffeur would either have gone off, or else have waited at the club."

"Oh—er—why, don't you see, I called over my shoulder to the chap when I came in here, and told him to stop. I couldn't tell what was going to happen, don't you know, and thought I might have use for him. You heard me tell him, didn't you, madam?" he appealed to Fadette. "No? Well, I guess you were too much excited to hear anything."

It was an elaborate explanation, but unconvincing. Still, there was no way to disprove it, and it had to stand, especially as Tom, struck by a belated afterthought, called on Julius to corroborate his statement, and Julius, with the knowledge of that twenty-dollar bill warm in his pocket, promptly did so.

But if Schuyler made rather a mess of handling this incident, he showed no such bungling when it came to getting the party loaded into the two vehicles and off for their destination.

By skilful maneuvering and rush tactics he managed to pack Brady, Fadette, Julius, and Marie, as a sort of "happy family," all into the taxicab, and send it on its way before they quite knew what he was doing, thus leaving the remaining Miss Van Buskirk's car to be occupied only by the girl and himself.

He had already seated her before he got the others embarked, and now, as he jumped in beside her and gave the order to go ahead, he was a little uncertain as to just how she was going to take his bold preemption of her society.

She gave a little start as the cab door slammed and the vehicle lurched forward.

"But we are leaving Marie behind!" she cried.

"No," rejoined Tom. "By some sort of mistake she got wedged in the other car. I saw her just as they were starting off."

Then he waited, wondering whether he was to be frozen by icy silence or scorched by the hot blast of her anger for his piece of impudence.

To his surprise, however, not to mention relief, there came instead a merry burst of ringing laughter.

"Oh," she twitted him, "what a feeble and inartistic fibber you are! Confess, too," she went on gaily, "that the whopper you invented about the waiting cab was only to cover up the shameless espionage you have been exercising over me?"

"Espionage over you?"

"Yes. Tell the truth now, weren't you hanging about the house; and, seeing me come out, didn't you deliberately follow me to Fadette's?"

"Well," he surrendered, "I don't know how you ever figured it all out, but that is just the way it happened. And you don't mind, Alma?" he cried happily. "Don't mind, either, my having you to myself this way?"

"Mind? Of course I don't mind. I like it. Any woman would. Why, Tom, this fool behavior of yours covers a multitude of sins. It shows that you really do care something for me, after all."

"Care for you?"

His voice took on a deeper note as he made an impulsive movement toward her.

"Why, Alma, I have always cared for you more than anything else in the world, only you wouldn't believe it. Let us sink these miserable differences, sweetheart. Let us make up, and forget all the—"

But she shook herself free from the clasp in which he would have enfolded her, and raised a restraining hand.

"Not yet, Tom," she teased. "You're only on probation so far, you want to understand, and whether you will ever be restored to full standing depends entirely on your good behavior. There must be no more outbreaks of jealousy, or interference with my freedom of action in any way."

"There won't be," he assured her humbly. "These ten days have been a terrible lesson to me. Oh, Alma, I will promise anything if only you will take me back."

"No-o," she decided hesitatingly; "at least not before to-morrow. I don't want to be an engaged girl to-night; for I still have hopes of recovering my hat, and if I do, I want to be free to go to the Horse Show, and act as I please."

"And cut around with that loafer Blaine, I suppose?" he muttered, his face now darkening.

"Ah?" she cried in triumph. "Didn't I tell you so? Oh, Tommy, Tommy, how easy it is to get a rise out of you! I can

see through you just as plainly as I could see through those lies you were telling to-night.

"And let me give you a friendly tip," she added with a sudden recollection. "Somebody else saw through those lies just as thoroughly as I did."

"Somebody else?"

"Yes. That detective."

"What do I care if he did? What's the matter with you, anyhow, Alma? You speak as though you were warning me against something."

"Well," significantly, "aren't you in a position to be warned? It strikes me—"

But a motor-car is a rather speedy vehicle, and the distance between Fadette's and the Van Buskirk's house had already been covered.

Before she could complete her sentence their conveyance came to a halt beside the curb, and Brady himself swung back the door for them to dismount.

There could be no further opportunity for conversation for the present, especially as Brady at once attached himself to Tom like the bark on a tree, or a porous plaster to a sore back, or a chaperon to a desirable girl, or any other phenomenon in nature which resolutely refuses to be got rid of.

So, a fly cop stood before the gates of paradise, and Tom was left in a highly irritating state of uncertainty as to whether he was to be taken back into favor or kept dangling on the string of his lady's caprices.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ACCUSATION.

BRADY, with eyes for everything, noticed as they passed up the steps and entered the door that the butler, haughty and impassive to all the rest, even to his mistress, bestowed a beaming smile of welcome upon Schuyler.

A little later he ventured to remark upon it to the recipient of the flattering condescension.

"By Jove, Mr. Schuyler," he said, "you seem to have all the help about this place lashed to the mast. That maid of Miss Van Buskirk's was ready to scratch my eyes out all evening if I had dared so much as to speak disrespectfully to you, and the butler nearly split his face just now when you nodded good evening to him."

"Yes," smiled Tom abstractedly, "they all seem to like me pretty well—that is," he laughed, "all except Silcott, the second man, who harbors a grouch against me for some reason I never could fathom. You'd have seen a very different expression if it had happened to be Silcott who opened the door to me to-night, instead of old Dartle."

The detective consequently lost no time as soon as opportunity offered in hunting up Silcott, and establishing friendly relations.

With the art of skilful pumping, which was his stock in trade, he also managed to draw from the fellow several items of interest which he deemed worthy of consideration in connection with the present case.

Had Silcott happened to observe Mr. Schuyler hanging about the place to any extent recently?

Sure. The big loafer was always piking along the street, mooning up at the windows ever since Miss Alma had given him the gate. Why, the thing had got to be a regular joke among the neighbors.

It didn't by chance happen that Schuyler had been there that evening, did it?

Didn't it? Well, of course, Silcott didn't claim to have any telescope eye; but he was willing to lay money, marbles, or chalk that it was none other he had seen sprinting madly down the street in chase of the motor-car bearing Miss Alma and that spitfire of a Marie off to Fadette's.

"Hy-guy, it was certainly comical," laughed Silcott. "Here that shine had been beating the bricks all evening on a chance of seeing Miss Alma, and then when she did come out, he was up to the corner. All he got was just a flash of her as she and 'Sarah Bernhardt' came scooting down the steps and jumped into the buzz-wagon. Then was when he done the Marathon I'm telling you about, until it ended with him catching another cab, and getting on even terms with them."

"Ah!" Brady thoughtfully stroked his chin. "But that wasn't the first time you had seen him to-night? He had been round here for quite a little while previous?"

"Ain't I telling you so? Oh, it must have been about fifteen or twenty minutes before that when I first piped him.

"I was in the front room just about dark fixing the curtains, when I seen a coon start to come up the steps with a big box under his arm. At the same moment I saw this Schuyler guy step back behind a tree out by the curb, and watch the door. Whether he'd

been talking to the coon or not, I can't say, but it looked like it.

"Then the bell rang, and I heard old Dartle starting to go to the door, so I had to quit my rubbering and pretend to be busy."

"So, Dartle went to the door, eh?" the detective asked sharply.

"No. As I said, he started to go, but before he got there Marie came flying down the stairs and beat him to it."

"Dartle must have been in the hall, though, when Marie passed back?"

"Oh, yes. I heard her say something to him in a low voice just as Miss Alma called to Marie over the banister, but what it was I couldn't catch.

"Then the old tyrant came in here and commenced pitching into me for not getting through my work faster. A healthy chance any man would have getting through, if he tried to do all Dartle lays out for him."

But the plain-clothes man had small inclination to listen to Silcott's purely personal grievances. He was satisfied that he had got out of the fellow all he knew, and was quite content to let it go at that, and close the interview.

Summed up, the revelations of the second man had left him with two queries in his mind.

First, was Schuyler responsible for the substitution of the red and green hat, and had he effected it by prearrangement with Julius when the latter appeared to make his delivery?

Second, why had Marie lied to him when she said she had neither met nor spoken to any one on her return from answering the door.

He had suspected her from the first in this statement; for his experience told him that in a *ménage* so extensive as that of Mr. Van Buskirk, a butler would almost certainly have started to respond to the bell, and hence she could hardly have failed to encounter him. Why she should try to deceive him, therefore, on so unimportant a point, puzzled him not a little.

He was well aware, too, that in just such apparently trifling discrepancies as this, lies the solution to most of the baffling and difficult cases.

Still, on the whole, he decided to address himself first to the former line of inquiry, as tending more to ordinary lines, and less toward the realm of the fantastic and fanciful.

Here, if the facts stood up to the theory, both motive and method were clear.

Schuyler's jealousy and desire to keep Alma from going to the Horse Show with his rival could easily have been the incentive to prompt him in the affair, when information of what was going on had been conveyed to him by the friendly servants.

Then, with such a tool at hand as the corruptible Julius, the *modus operandi* would readily suggest itself.

Before he could make an accusation, though, Brady felt that he must fortify himself with more substantial evidence, and, therefore, after spending some time in the telephone-booth—apparently to his own entire satisfaction—he betook himself, on the strength of Silcott's disclosures, out to the tree by the curb in the hope of finding some clue — footprints, or the like — that Schuyler had really been there.

He was luckier than he expected to be; for, hardly had he entered on his search before a small object lying near at hand caught his eye, and pouncing on it, he discovered it to be an ornate gold match-box with the name Thomas Schuyler engraved across the front of it.

Triumphantly sure of his ground now, he returned hurriedly to the house and sought out Tom, whom, to keep engaged, he had left in charge of Julius.

Alma, Fadette, and Marie, who had been talking in an adjoining room, seemed to divine from the detective's manner that something was afoot, and expectantly drew near.

"Schuyler," said the plain-clothes man importantly, rather enjoying the fact that he had an audience, "the game is up. I want you to return that hat!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACTS OF THE CASE.

TOM stared up at the demand, as though he thought the detective had suddenly gone crazy.

"You want me to return the hat?" he repeated dazedly. "Why, certainly, my dear fellow, with the greatest of pleasure—if you will just tell me where it is.

"What is this?" he continued a trifle more sternly, as he began to grasp the import of the other's words. "A hold-up, or a joke?"

"You'll soon find out that it's very far

from being either," snapped Brady. "Come, you can't bluff any more; I've got the dead wood on you. All that's left you is to cough up the hat."

The society man started to his feet, his fists clenched, the big veins swelling out on his forehead.

"Why, you contemptible—" he began to storm, but restrained himself.

"Look here, Brady," he said, "don't tell me that you are such an ass as seriously to accuse me of this thing."

"Well, barring the compliments, that's about the size of it," rejoined Brady coolly. "I say that you're the one who took Miss Van Buskirk's hat."

"But, man alive," protested Tom, "you mustn't go recklessly flinging charges of that kind around without foundation! You've got to have evidence in this country."

"Oh, I've got the evidence, all right—more evidence than I need. Do you want to deny, for instance, that you bought that hat with the red and green roses over at Feldmann & Avchin's this afternoon?"

"Well," Schuyler considered, "I might *want* to deny it, seeing that you say so; no one but drunks will buy that kind of thing. Still, since I am duly sober, and since you have evidently hunted out the sale, I don't see what else I can do but admit the corn.

"I was afraid all the time you would trace the thing down to me, Brady. Yet, even so, I don't quite understand how you did it so quickly, considering all the hundreds of milliner shops there are in New York."

"Oh, that was the easiest part of the job," averred Brady, quite willing to exploit his own cleverness. "All I had to do was to pick out of a business directory the names of the shops in the neighborhood where you live, and then telephone each of them in turn. I had an idea that you wouldn't go far afield to get what you wanted, and the result proved that I was right; for Feldmann & Avchin's was the second firm on my list.

"There was no trouble in identifying you, either." He grinned. "All I had to do was describe the hat. They don't get one like that across once in a blue moon."

"Well, it was very shrewd of you," generously conceded Schuyler; "very shrewd, indeed. But you'll need something more than that to make your charge stick."

"All right, then; how about this?" And the plain-clothes man slipped his hand in his pocket to produce the engrossed match-safe.

"My match-box!" exclaimed Tom.

"Exactly. And do you know where I found it? Right out here under that big tree along the sidewalk, where you stood in hiding to watch and see how your scheme turned out.

"Oh, you can't break away from me," he cried exultantly. "I've got every move you made mapped out.

"First, you heard from one of the servants here — probably Marie — that Miss Van Buskirk was going to the Horse Show with Blaine, and you made up your mind that you'd prevent it.

"You'd learned, too, of the splurge she was planning to make in the way of a costume, and the idea popped into your head, that if you could interfere with that in some way, the trick would be turned.

"The hat, of course, was the easiest thing to tackle; so with that to start on, you doped out your little scheme.

"You either saw Julius beforehand, and made your arrangements with him, or else proposed the bargain to him when he arrived at the house.

"At any rate you were there with the 'fire alarm' hat when he did arrive. The terms between you were satisfactorily adjusted, the Feldmann & Avchin beauty shifted into Mme. Fadette's box and handed in, after which Julius took the Fadette hat off with him, probably over to that Fifty-Third Street sweetheart of his, whose name he don't want mentioned.

"Then, you waited round to see just what character the blow-out was going to take, and when you found that Miss Van Buskirk was headed for Fadette's, you chased after her as hard as you could, so as to be on hand to direct proceedings and fend off suspicion from yourself.

"There," he concluded, "don't you think I have pretty well got the goods on you?"

The three women, each of whom had been breathlessly following the detective's recital throughout, signalized the end by a differing and characteristic burst of emotion.

Soft-hearted Marie fell to crying and wringing her hands.

Fadette betook herself to violent vituperation and hysterical demands for vengeance.

But Alma, with a proud and happy smile upon her face, crept close to Tom under cover of Fadette's foaming denunciations, and whispered softly:

"Did you really do all this for me?"

"I did not!" he denied indignantly. "Not for you, nor for anybody else. I did not do it at all!

"In short, ladies"—he strove to calm the turbulent uproar — "you are wasting both your tears and your anathemas upon an unworthy object. I am not the guilty man.

"It is simply," he proceeded, "the old story of those who look only on one side of the shield declaring it to be all iron, while those who look only on the other side declare it to be all gold. Mr. Brady is right in every one of his facts, and wrong in every one of his deductions."

"Is that so?" snarled the detective, stung by the aspersion on his reasoning powers. "Is that so? Then how about this?"

Leaning over suddenly, he thrust his hand into Julius's vest-pocket, and brought to light Tom's twenty-dollar bill.

"How about this?" he sneered, waving the thing under Tom's nose. "Here's the double sawbuck I saw you give this coon with my own eyes, telling him at the same time that he must keep his head shut, and not talk, no matter what happened, and that you'd stand by him.

"I guess," he cried, "there ain't but one deduction to be drawn from that!"

CHAPTER IX.

FOR THE DEFENSE.

BEFORE this crowning proof, the last faint, lingering idea that Schuyler might be innocent, fled from each of the three women.

Tom could see it reflected in their faces; could discern it even more strongly in their actions.

A horrid chill passed over him. If those who knew him and were acquainted with all the circumstances could so readily doubt him, what must be expected of the general public, who, at the best, would receive only a partial and distorted report of the case.

Not that he was really in fear of having his liberty circumscribed or suffering any other physical pains or penalties as a result of the affair; but he did shrink from the publicity dependent upon an arrest or court proceeding of any sort.

Moreover, as he somewhat ruefully reflected, there was no certainty that he would escape a term behind the bars.

Wealth and influence can do a good deal toward lifting the blindfold of Justice; but if a case, by reason of some special feature, or the social standing of the defendant, attracts undue attention, nothing can be accomplished, and Schuyler had to recognize that his dilemma was one in which the newspapers would revel.

A millionaire society man accused of stealing his former sweetheart's hat! He writhed in spirit, as his fancy foresaw the lengths to which the headline writers would possibly go.

No; truly it was no laughing matter that he was up against. The charge, if pressed, could not be less than grand larceny, and that meant Sing Sing, for he did not know how many years.

In short, the accusation against him must be throttled here and now, before it had a chance to assume more serious proportions.

Desperately, therefore, he set himself to the task of overriding the conviction already settled in the minds of his hearers.

"Listen to me, ladies," he pleaded, "and you, too, Brady. I think I can explain to you every circumstance, if you will only not prejudge me, but give me a fair show for my white ally.

"For Heaven's sake, keep still, madam," he broke off, to exhort Fadette, who uninfluenced by his appeal, still continued to voice her shrill demands that he be taken into custody. "I am willing to pay the price of the hat twice over, if that is what is bothering you.

"Now," he resumed, when this argument succeeded to some extent in producing the desired effect. "Now, let me take up the buying of the Feldmann & Avchin hat, which I admit looks suspicious, but which is chiefly so on account of the coincidence of having been purchased to-day.

"I had been wanting for quite a while to do something nice for Marie here, who had been very kind to me in many ways, but had not been able to decide on just what form my gratitude should take.

"This afternoon, however, while setting off down-town, I happened to notice this hat in the show-window as I passed, and at once the thought came to me that it was the thing to give her. 'Girls always like a new hat,' I said to myself. 'I am sure nothing would please her better.'

"You see"—he hesitated a moment, then made the naive confession — "you see, I considered it very pretty."

The three women shuddered as one at such an avowal, and Brady had to smile in spite of himself.

"So," concluded Schuyler, "I went in and bought the thing, and ordered it sent up here to Marie. That is all I know about it. And how it ever got into Fadette's box, or did any of the rest of the stunts it has been up to, I am as ignorant as any of the rest of you. My sole impulse in the matter was an innocent desire to give pleasure, and repay a host of kindly obligations. You must believe me in this. You cannot fail to believe me. It is the truth."

But, except for Marie's uninterrupted sobbing, his assertion was received in blank silence. Manifestly his defense had failed to carry weight, or remove the unfavorable impression against him.

Somewhat less confidently, Tom took up the second count of his indictment.

"As to hanging around here to an undue extent," he said, "I will have to plead guilty. I had an excuse for it, and it is one which any person who has ever been in love will readily understand.

"Nor was to-day any exception to my regular rule. I walked past here several times during the afternoon, and happened to be making one of these promenades just at the time Julius arrived with his box and started up the steps.

"So, not knowing who would come to the door, and not desirous of being seen, if it should chance to be Silcott, I stepped back into the shadow of the tree, where I had often stood before.

"Later, when I started to resume my strolling, I lighted a cigarette, and I suppose it was then I dropped my match-box.

"I must insist, however, that I did not speak to Julius or hold any dealings with him, either at the stoop or anywhere else, prior to the time that he collided into me in front of Fadette's in his attempt to get away.

"Likewise," he continued, "I want you to believe that my pursuit of Miss Van Buskirk and Marie down to the millinery establishment was entirely impulsive and unpremeditated.

"I was strolling aimlessly up and down the sidewalk here, as I have already told you, when I saw the two come out of the house apparently in great agitation, and start off in a taxi.

"Never dreaming what was the matter, but eager to be of help to them, if possible, I gave hurried chase, at first on my two feet, and later in a second taxi, when I managed to overhaul one.

"Now"—he paused a moment—"coming to the episode of Julius and the twenty-dollar bill, I find on reflection that my motives were a trifle mixed—not altogether altruistic, and yet by no means so sinister as has been made out. The truth of the matter is that I saw the boy had been considerably knocked about and abused, and in addition was frightened half out of his wits, and I felt sorry for him.

"Yet—I will conceal nothing from you—there was also present in my mind an idea of personal advantage. I had had nothing to do with setting up the deck or dealing the cards for this hat fiasco; but since things seemed to be falling my way, I was willing to reap the benefit of it.

"You see, I was thoroughly convinced then, and am about the same now, that Julius was fully aware of what had become of the missing hat.

"Therefore, I said to myself, that if he could be made to keep silence until to-morrow, and strengthened up so as not to weaken under the police 'third degree,' Alma would be prevented from keeping her engagement, and I would score over that fellow Blaine.

"I promised myself, of course, that in the morning I would get hold of Julius and force him to clear up the mystery, but for this one night I was willing to connive at his wrong-doing and buy his silence.

"So," he finished, leaning back and folding his arms, "there you have the whole story—the full extent of my offending, and the true explanation for every step I took in the mix-up.

"Why," he exclaimed again, "you must believe me. It is ridiculous to suppose that I planned all this as part of a deep-laid plot!"

He glanced around a trifle anxiously, but found no response in any of the faces toward which he looked.

Marie was still weeping, rocking her body back and forth, with her head in her arms. Brady's countenance was set and stern as flint, except for the gleam of professional elation which lurked in his eyes. Even Julius was gazing owlish and askance at him, with an expression which betrayed no doubt of Tom's guilt.

Then, as he looked from one to another, Alma, who evidently so far had failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation, and

regarded it largely as a huge joke, crept close to him and whispered teasingly:

"Tom, didn't I tell you that you are the most wretched liar that ever lived? If you can't do better than that, you'd better quit."

"I should say so," echoed Fadette, who had managed to overhear. "Such a pack of rubbish I never heard in all my born days.

"Oh," impatiently to the detective, "what's the use of waiting around here any longer? Bundle him and his coon confederate off to prison, I say, and waste no further time about it. I can't stay up all night in order to make the charge against them."

"Will you be still, woman!" broke in Schuyler irritably. "I have already told you I will pay full value for the hat."

"No, I won't be still," she retorted, "and as for paying, you can't give me one red cent. Mr. Brady tells me that if I take money from you I will be compounding a felony, whatever that may mean; and anyway, I believe it will be better for me to put you through. It will not only be a big ad. for my place, but will show folks that Fadette don't stand for any kind of mistakes or disappointments.

"Yes," she cried, her voice rising to a vindictive crescendo, "I am going to push this charge for all I am worth, and have you sent up the river, where you won't be playing funny tricks for quite a spell to come."

"You hear what she says." Brady stepped over and laid an authoritative hand on Tom's shoulder. "Come along, coon. I guess the three of us had better be trotting over to the station-house."

CHAPTER X.

THE PARTING SALUTE.

ALMA, at last brought to some sense of what was in the wind, recoiled as she saw the detective's action, and quickly laid her hand against her heart.

"What is it?" she gasped. "Tell me what it means."

"Simply that I am arrested," he returned grimly. "But don't worry, little girl, I'll come out all right."

Anxious to avoid a scene, he rose quickly, and nodded toward Brady.

"Come on," he said. "I'm ready."

But Alma threw herself impulsively between them, and threw her arms about Tom.

"Arrested!" she cried, her eyes wide and incredulous. "For that silly, old hat? And that woman is doing it?"

She turned upon Fadette the glance of an enraged lioness.

What more she would have said or done cannot be told; for at that moment came another interruption to the party's hurried departure.

Marie, who had been sitting as though stunned ever since Brady had laid his hand on Tom, suddenly sprang forward and seized the detective by the free arm.

"No, no," she shrieked, in a babble of mingled French and English. "You shall not take him! He ees not guilty! Come, I will make ze clean breast. I will tell—"

But, overcome by her emotions, she broke off with a gasp, released her hold on Brady's arm, and had he not caught her, would have fallen to the floor in a swoon.

Tom hurriedly summoned the housekeeper and a couple of the servants, and had her removed to her room.

Then again, he impatiently signaled the detective.

"Hurry up, can't you," he muttered. "Let us get out of this."

But once more Alma barred the way.

"Not without me!" she declared hysterically. "You are not fit to be trusted alone, Tom Schuyler, any more than a baby; and hereafter I am going to stay right by your side. If you have to go to prison, so shall I; for I am going to insist that you stop long enough on the way to the police-station to be married to me."

"Nonsense, Alma," he adjured. "What you ask is impossible. Even if I would consent, don't you know that a license is necessary for a marriage in New York, and that can absolutely not be obtained to-night?

"Come"—he strove to free himself from her arms—"let me go, dear. There is positively nothing to fret about in this arrest. It simply means that I shall have to go with Brady to the police-station, and arrange for bail. I shall be with you again in half an hour."

But still she clung to him, and refused to let him go.

Tom began to think he would have to send for her father, in order that he might gain his release.

Suddenly, however, she liberated him of her own accord, and sprang back from him, her face irradiated, one hand uplifted.

"Wait!" she cried. "I have been thinking, and it has just come to me what Marie

meant, what she would have said if she had not fainted!"

Swiftly she turned toward the hall, beckoning them all to follow; and when they were assembled there, she paused before an elaborately carved mahogany bench which stood against the wall.

Then leaning over, she raised the seat, disclosing that it served as a lid to a receptacle underneath.

Crowding around her, they looked down into this and beheld—the mysteriously missing hat from Fadette's.

"But what does it mean?" stammered Tom, when he had regained his breath. "Surely you have not done all this as a joke, Alma?"

"I? Oh, no! Didn't I say that this was what Marie was about to confess to?"

"Marie?" There came a surprised chorus. "Was she the culprit?"

"Yes; assisted as I believe by old Dartle. You see," she explained, "they are both ardent partizans of Tom's, and were determined that I should not go to the Horse Show with another man.

"The way to prevent it probably suggested itself to Marie this afternoon when she received that awful hat, and she and Dartle no doubt then laid their plans to accomplish their *coup*.

"The hat to be substituted was placed here in the seat ready to hand, and Dartle was instructed to make the exchange when Fadette's messenger should arrive.

"But my sending Marie herself to the door disarranged their plans, and forced them to work more swiftly than they had expected. I did not remember when you asked me, Mr. Brady, but I recall now, that the strings were all untied when the box came up to me.

"In her swift passage through the hall, Marie must have opened the box, taken out my hat and exchanged it for the 'fire-alarm' which Dartle was holding ready, and then have come on up to me, leaving him to dispose of Fadette's creation, as you have seen."

There was a moment of awkward silence after she finished; then Brady broke the ice by murmuring:

"And to think that all the trouble was taken for nothing!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Alma.

"Why, simply that you wouldn't have kept that engagement at the Horse Show tonight—hat or no hat."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Oh, I forgot; you don't know. Well, Mr. Davis Blaine absconded for Belgium this afternoon with eighty thousand dollars of his bank's money. He sailed at four o'clock."

"Well!" exclaimed Tom.

Then a sudden light flashed into his eye, and he stepped over to the girl.

"Alma," he said, "it's plain to be seen that you are no more fit to be trusted alone than a baby; and hereafter I am going to stay right by your side. Watch me now while I phone for my motor, and when it comes, you and I are going out to get married."

"Ah, but we can't, Tom. You said that a license would be needed."

"In New York, yes; but Jersey is only across the river," he cried triumphantly, "and I know of an old codger there who will tie the knot at any hour, day or night.

"There's no use trying to get out of it," he announced firmly; "so you might as well submit. And I guess," he added, "you had better wear this famous hat and the costume you were going to dazzle the Horse Show with. We will drop in there on the way back from the ceremony and surprise some people."

And for a wonder, Alma did not enter a protest.

"I will be ready in ten minutes," was all she said, as she hurried off up-stairs to don, with Fadette's aid, the wondrous gown, and to set the bird-of-paradise hat upon her golden curls.

Then she came down to join Tom, and together they went out to the waiting car.

From the steps, as they sped away, Fadette called after them a parting benison:

"No mistakes, and no disappointments!"

THE PESSIMIST.

THE path was cool. Sweet Nature threw
Wide-spread the doors of her abode.
He turned from paths of sparkling dew,
And chose to tread the dusty road.

Kenneth Bruce.

Selling Our Heritage.

BY COURTENAY SAVAGE.

Twenty-Seven Vast Rooms and Twenty-Seven Varieties of Wild Animals and Men Almost Eliminate a Couple of Millionaires from the List.

THANK Heaven, we both have a sense of humor! If we hadn't, I don't know what would have become of us.

You see Ethel, she's my sister, and I were left orphans at the tender ages of nineteen and twenty-one. Father left us a little money well invested, so we weren't really hard up. I had just finished college and was working in a broker's office down-town. Ethel kept house, and my sixteen dollars and the twenty we got from the interest gave us enough each week to live very comfortably.

We were practically alone in the world. Dad had one brother, a half-crazy bachelor, and mother had been an only child. She had some cousins, but as they lived somewhere in East Africa, we can count them out right away.

When dad died, Uncle Jack came to the funeral, and before he went back to his home in the country, where he lived the year round, he told us he would help us any time we needed assistance, and invited us to spend our vacation with him the following summer.

Neither of us had seen Uncle Jack for several years—father had always told us what a crazy old fellow he was—and we regarded him as something similar to a freak in a museum.

The winter passed. I kept working as hard as I could work, and Ethel was busy all the hours of the day. In the spring there was a shake-up in the business, and I came out with flying colors. My salary was raised from eight hundred to twelve hundred a year. That put us on easy street. We really looked forward to enjoying ourselves in our own quiet way, until one day a letter came from Uncle Jack.

He said that as it was the custom for the Stock Exchange to close the Friday and Saturday before Easter, he knew I would have those days as holidays, and he invited us to spend them with him. He wanted us to go down by an early train on Friday morning. Of course we were delighted. We'd never seen his place, and the prospect of three days in the country was delicious.

Friday morning dawned gray and dull. Ethel looked dubiously at her new hat, and then decided to wear the old one she'd fixed up for every day. I put on my new tan oxfords and then thought it best to wear my old black boots, and put the oxfords in the valise.

I'd written to uncle, saying we'd take the nine-thirty-something train from the city. Pineville is only twenty-nine miles out, but it took us just an hour and a half to get there.

When we were about half way, it started to rain. My, how it did rain! The drops seemed to be about the size of a half-dollar. Ethel was as cross as two sticks, and I didn't feel very much better.

Presently the train went round a curve and then it started to back. After a quarter of a mile of this it stopped with a jolt that almost threw you over the seat in front of you, and the guard yelled something that later experience taught us meant "Pineville! Last stop—all out!"

We gathered up our luggage, shook out our umbrellas, and descended to the platform. Never in my whole existence have I seen anything as desolate or as dismal as Pineville on that first day. The station

certainly hadn't seen a coat of paint in twenty years. The roof of the platform leaked, and the boards of the platform itself were rotting as fast as they could.

We looked round for uncle, but he was nowhere in sight. Then I went round to where the carriages were, to see if by any chance he was there. I found an automobile, a couple of smart-looking rigs, and the worst collection of hacks I had ever seen drawn up, but no uncle. I went back to Ethel, and found her talking to a great, raw-boned fellow of somewhere about her own age.

"I just said to myself that must be them, when I seen you looking round," he was saying. "So I took the boldness to speak."

"Yes," answered Ethel, smiling her sweetest.

"Now, if you'll both be good enough to come with me, I'll show you where the wagon is."

And to my great surprise he picked up the valise and led the way.

"I'm a taking this," he called back over his shoulder, "because Mr. Fulton told me to. He said if I was good, he'd give me two days to the fair instead of one."

By this time we'd arrived at where the "wagon" was. The horse was a huge farm-horse that hadn't been cleaned or clipped since he was born, and the wagon —well, the only place I ever saw another like it was at Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and they used it in the part where the Indians attacked the stage-coach.

We climbed in, and after yelling and snapping the whip a few times the boy got the horse going. We drove through the main street of the town, and then struck out into the country.

Oh, the mud we went through! And the way the wagon creaked and groaned! We didn't have time to talk, it was all we could do to keep from being thrown to the floor.

We bumped along for a few miles, and then the boy stopped the horse and climbed down from his seat. We wondered what was the matter, nothing seemed wrong, and there wasn't any house in sight. He opened the door and announced that we were just half way, and if we were hungry there was a bag of cookies under the seat. Without another word he climbed back to his seat and drove on.

When we recovered from our surprise we both started to laugh. After that we felt better, and agreed that it was the funniest experience we had ever had.

Presently we came to a very high stone wall. We began to wonder what was on the other side of it. Ethel said it was an orphanage, while I held out for a lunatic asylum.

We were both wrong, for just at that moment the horse turned in at a gate, and we found it was Uncle Jack's place.

The rain had stopped during our five-mile drive and the sun was doing its best to come out as we drove up to the house.

II.

WHAT a magnificent place it was! The grounds were wonderfully laid out, and the house was immense. We found afterward it had twenty-seven rooms.

The carriage stopped in front of a small flight of steps, and as I started to alight, the door at the top of them opened, and, to our great surprise, a man in green and gold livery came running down and helped us alight. We said nothing, but followed him into the house.

There in a large hall we found uncle. He got up from his chair by the open fire and came to meet us. I never noticed before how tall he was, or how broad his shoulders were.

"I am glad you have come, my dear children," he said, his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown. "You will be able to help me in my great sorrow. Katie is dead!"

"Katie is dead!" echoed Ethel, looking toward me as though for an explanation.

I suppose the astonished look on my face made him remember that we did not know Katie.

"Pardon me, my dear children, I forgot you did not know Katie. She was my favorite cow. She died this morning. How I will miss her."

I felt that Ethel was looking very hard at the back of my neck. I wanted to see if she was, but if I had turned my head I am sure that we both would have exploded with laughter.

"Now, my dear children, I will leave you to amuse yourselves. After luncheon I shall feel better, and then I will show you the grounds. This way to your rooms."

We followed him up the broad stairs to where the rooms were. My room was an immense one, with a big four-poster in the center of it. I heard uncle go down-stairs,

and went at once to Ethel's room. I found her sitting on the bed almost convulsed with laughter.

"Poor Katie," she said, when she could speak. "Oh! Bob, I never saw anything half so funny as your face when uncle told us Katie was his cow."

Sharp at one o'clock we proceeded to the dining-room. The meal passed in the usual way. Uncle asked many questions about my business and our home life.

The only thing at all out of the ordinary was the dress of the maid that waited on the table. It was of green cloth, trimmed with large gold buttons, and a quantity of lace. We both opened our eyes when she appeared, but that was all.

After lunch uncle took us on a tour of inspection. We visited the barns, and the chicken-run. Then the flower and vegetable gardens. I had been wondering how one man could use all the rooms there must be in the house, and my wonder was increased by his showing us a building that was used by the servants as their sleeping quarters.

We went into the house by a side-door and made our way up a flight of narrow winding stairs. After climbing almost fifty feet we reached a platform with a telescope arranged on it.

"This is where I come at night when I wish to study the stars," uncle said.

"How lovely," said Ethel. "I am so fond of the stars."

"Liar!" I said inwardly. Then aloud: "I am sorry that I have not had sufficient time to give to astronomy. It was my favorite study at school."

Uncle's face beamed.

We stayed up there for a quarter of an hour while he told us a lot about the observations he had made when the comet was visible. I tried to look as though I understood him, but my heart was in my boots for fear he would ask me a question and I wouldn't know what he was talking about.

He didn't, however, and we went downstairs. It was then that I discovered how he used so many rooms.

"On this floor, my dear children," he said, "are six rooms. They are my music-room, my painting-room, my southern room, my writing-room, my shooting-gallery, and my gymnasium. Six in all. I will show you the southern room first, but you must wait in the hall here till I see if Mary is in bed. Mary does not like strangers, as a rule, and I must see that she is safe in her house before you enter."

He disappeared through a big door and left us alone.

"Mary doesn't like strangers," said Ethel with awe. "I wonder who 'Mary' can be?"

"A cat or a dog probably. Remember that Katie was the cow," I answered.

I was beginning to wish we hadn't come. The place had the queerest atmosphere you can imagine. You felt as though some one or something was likely to jump at you from any of the corners of the hall.

Uncle came back and conducted us to the southern room. It was thirty feet square, I should say, and fitted up with palms and other tropical plants, in tubs. There was an abundance of flowers everywhere, and the sunlight streaming in through the windows made the place look like the tropical room in the botanical gardens. I looked round for something that might be Mary, but I could see nothing whatsoever.

"She is here," said uncle, guessing my purpose, and he led us to a corner where a tank was sunken in the floor.

Mary was an alligator.

"She is very docile," he said. "Only once have I seen her angry, and then she bit one of the maids rather badly on the arm."

Ethel shuddered and walked away. Uncle and I stayed and watched the ugly creature. Suddenly Ethel gave a piercing shriek. We rushed to her side, and I looked where she was pointing. It was a beautifully marked snake, some six feet long, and lying curled round the foot of a young orange-tree.

"Oh, it's only Peter," said uncle in a surprised tone. "He won't harm you. I keep him to give the place the proper atmosphere. His fangs have been removed, and he wouldn't bite if he could."

Ethel made a break for the door, and we followed. Uncle took us from room to room, and each one was more astonishing than the former. The music-room was fitted up with every kind of an instrument imaginable. The writing-room had only a small desk in one corner, and was very dirty.

"I can always think better in squalid surroundings," uncle said. "True genius never had a pleasant home, and when I

want to write one of my novels I come here to do it."

The painting-room was an artist's studio. On an easel was a very poor attempt at a landscape, and in each of the corners were piled cans of paint. Poor uncle, he actually used house-paint for his pictures! No wonder they were so bad.

The shooting-gallery and the gymnasium were what their names led us to suppose. After investigating them we went to the floor below.

Here uncle told us were seven rooms. Three used as bedrooms, three as his menagerie, and the other as his laboratory.

Ethel was half afraid to go into the menagerie, but when she was assured that all the animals were securely caged she went. There were some foxes, a timber-wolf, some small species of deer, two wild-cats, a couple of raccoons, an Angora goat, and a cage full of rabbits.

Never have I heard of such a collection. It was interesting to see the way the animals all recognized uncle's voice, and how tame they were. Each one had a name. John was the timber-wolf, Susie and Fred the wildcats, and if I remember rightly, Francis was the goat.

The laboratory was an ordinary one, similar to a chemist's, with its orderly rows of evil-looking bottles and racks of test-tubes.

The remainder of the house was fitted up in a homelike manner. Comfortable chairs, inviting lounges, and tables with magazines and papers on them.

The rest of the day passed quietly, and at ten o'clock we bade each other good night and went to our rooms.

I undressed quickly and jumped into bed. The day had been a long one for me, and I was tired, so in less than no time I was asleep.

I awoke some hours later with a sensation that something was wrong. I lay still and listened, but could hear nothing.

I was debating whether to reach up and switch on the electric light, when I heard a peculiar noise coming from the foot of the bed. Visions of Mary, Peter, and Francis rose in my mind, and the hair on the back of my neck began to rise, when something cold and clammy touched the soles of my feet.

I gave one shriek and sprang out of bed with a bound. As I jumped I pulled the mattress and the covers with me. and they fell on the floor. I stood there in the darkness, my hair all on end, my power of speech gone—in a word, scared stiff.

I managed by some means to turn on the light in the center of the room, and I stood petrified, and watched the heap of bed-clothes. They were moving around in the most unusual manner. After a minute the thing began to untangle itself and it put its head out.

It was a fox-terrier puppy.

Had it been the alligator I could not have been more surprised. I stood and stared at him, and he sat with his head on one side and contemplated me, wondering, I suppose, why I had dumped him on the floor, and thrown the mattress on top of him.

When I recovered from my fright, I got down on the floor and started to fondle the dog, and it was then that the really funny part of the business appealed to me. I sat there for almost an hour, laughing and playing with the little beast.

After a time I began to grow cold, so I made up the bed, and tried to get to sleep. I couldn't, however, but just lay awake till morning. However the dog got into the room I can't say. I suppose the reason he came into bed was to get warm.

The next two days passed quickly and quietly. It seemed as though they had all the excitement the first day so as to get it over with. We walked and rode round the country in all directions, and on Sunday we went to church.

Sunday evening when we departed for home uncle told us that he had enjoyed our visit, and would look forward to our coming again.

"I want you to spend a great deal of your time here," he said. "I want you to grow to think of this place as your home. It will all be yours some day, for I am going to leave it to you when I die."

"You are too good to us," Ethel told him, but he stopped her short.

"*Tut, tut,* my child. Don't thank me because I tell you I am going to give you what is really yours. This place is your birthright, your heritage. You were born to live here."

The carriage came up just then, and after more goodbys we left him.

"Well," said Ethel, as we drove down the road, "we may have been born to live here, but they'll have to move the animals first. I almost had heart-failure every time

I went to my room for fear I might find one of them in my bed."

Then I told her of my experience.

"I should have died," she said in horror.

III.

We got home safely. I wrote to uncle thanking him for the pleasant time we had had, but we didn't receive any answer. Ethel said as far as she was concerned she didn't care if we never heard from him. She said she knew she would never be able to pass another night in the house with the animals.

Some six or seven weeks passed, and summer came with full force. One Saturday afternoon we'd been down for a swim, and stayed for supper. It was about nine when we got home, and as I opened the front door the telephone was ringing like mad.

I answered, and found that it was a Mr. Jackson, a lawyer, and he wanted to see us at once. I told him we'd be at home and he said he would come right up. What could a lawyer want of us, we wondered. We thought of everything imaginable but the right thing.

Uncle was dead and buried! According to his wishes, we had not been notified.

Mr. Jackson called to tell us that and to acquaint us with the terms of the will.

"Outside of a few minor bequests to the servants, everything is to be divided equally between you," he said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Under certain conditions," he went on, "whereby you prove your merit. Your uncle has put a clause in his will where he says that if you prove yourselves business people by selling the house and grounds at Pineville in two months' time, you receive unconditionally the whole of his estate, which amounts to almost two million dollars."

Two million! I wanted to shout, but I was so astonished my vocal chords were paralyzed.

"If, however, you do not sell the house in the stated time you receive only the house and grounds at Pineville between you, and the sum of ten thousand dollars apiece. The rest of the money will, in this case, be divided among several charitable organizations.

"I should advise you to start work at once. Go out to the house as soon as possible, and get all the information necessary, and then put it in the hands of all the reputable real-estate men in the city. I think you will be successful. I hope so, at any rate, and I trust that if there is anything I can do for you, you will let me know."

"Thank you very much," I said. "We will go out there to-morrow, won't we, Ethel?"

"Yes — but — did uncle say anything about the animals?" she asked.

"How forgetful of me," said Mr. Jackson. "Mr. Fulton ordered them all killed and stuffed, and he asked that you put aside a room in your home, and place them in it. He wished to know that after his death their memory would still be kept bright by friends."

"Certainly, we can give them a room," I said. "We'd do anything for uncle, wouldn't we, Ethel?"

"Yes," she answered, "as long as he didn't ask me to dust them off. They can have the room, but if I have anything to say, it will always be locked, and the key hidden."

Mr. Jackson left us, and the minute he was gone I started to dance a jig, I was so happy.

"Don't," said Ethel. "Remember you're in mourning."

"Why, yes," I said. "I forgot all about that. I suppose we ought to buy some black clothes."

I didn't feel a bit like mourning. Fancy uncle leaving such a queer will. He was crazy!

The next morning we went out to our house—*our house*. We worked all day making out lists of furniture, descriptions of the grounds, size of the rooms, and that sort of thing.

We weren't very busy at the office, and I managed to get a few hours off on Monday. Together we visited almost every real-estate man in the city. We put an advertisement in each of the daily papers, and in two weeklies. Then we waited for returns.

Nothing happened the first week. We seemed to live from one mail-time till the next. Every time the telephone rang, we hoped it was an inquiry about the place, or word from some of the real-estate people. We only had two months to sell the place in, and the two worst months in the year, July and August.

At the end of the week we received a

letter from a woman saying she would like to see the place. We appointed a day and took her out there.

She was a peculiar kind of a woman. Ethel thought she was an actress. She seemed rather impressed with the place, but said she wasn't sure whether it suited her or not.

She asked us if we would let her live in the place for a week, and by that time she would be able to tell us if she liked it. We consented; we would have consented to anything, and she went to live there.

We didn't hear from her for a week, and on Sunday we went down to see how things were getting on. We walked out from the village, and when we came to the beginning of the stone wall we heard the most unusual noises coming from the other side.

We stopped and listened, and I decided to climb up and see what was happening. I got a foothold in the bricks and shinned up. The sight that met my eyes made me gasp with amazement.

Mrs. Smith, the lady who had rented the house, was standing on the back of a horse, going round and round, while a man stood in the center of the ring, snapping a whip at regular intervals, and on an improvised trapeze two young girls, clad in the airiest of garments, were swinging back and forth.

"What is it?" asked Ethel. "Tell me what it is!"

I jumped down and helped her up. We sat there on the wall and watched the performance.

They didn't notice us for some time. The horse saw us first, and shied just the least little bit. That made Mrs. Smith look in our direction.

Wasn't she mad when she saw us? She got down from her horse and came over to us, swearing a blue streak. She said that she had planned to buy the place, but now she wouldn't take it for a gift. She marched herself into the house, and as soon as she could dress in her street clothes she departed.

The two girls and the man never said a word, just did as she told them. She had two men working for her, and they took down the trapeze and looked after the horse.

We found afterward that she was a well-known circus-rider named La Belle Something-or-other, and the man and the two girls were her husband and daughters.

During the weeks that followed we showed the house to all kinds and conditions of people. One man thought it would be a splendid place for his wife's aunt to buy because she was feeble-minded, but auntie objected to the price.

A woman thought she would buy it and start some sort of a religious cult. She said the beautiful oak-trees on the property would help her soul.

Some one else thought it would make a splendid chicken-farm, though personally I think thirty acres too much to devote to chickens. Another woman thought she would buy it because she liked the high stone wall. She would have taken it if we had knocked off five hundred from the purchase price. She had been disappointed in love, and she wanted to devote her life to the care of animals. She hoped never to have to speak to a man again, and she would be happy if she never saw one.

An actress wanted the place to take a rest-cure in. The second time she saw the place she brought along two moving-vans full of trunks. She was on the point of saying "Yes," when her maid, who arrived with the second load of trunks, gave her a letter. It was from a manager offering her an enormous sum for ten weeks in vaudeville. She took the manager's offer, and she and her trunks went back to the city.

Luck certainly was against us, but after six weeks we found some one who, we felt sure, would take the place.

They were a newly married couple. He was very rich, and had literary ambitions. She just adored him, and thought everything he wrote "just too sweet for words." They wanted a place in the country where he could write his books. Some friend had seen our advertisement, and sent it to them. Then they had come to see us.

A "pal" of mine had gone on a fishing trip, and left me his automobile. It was a small car, seating four persons, and I took them out to the house. The minute they saw it they went into raptures over it. Somehow or other I didn't feel quite right. I suppose it was foolish, but I felt as though something was about to happen.

They got out of the car, and I swung it round so as not to have to turn it when we came out. While I was doing this I saw, or thought I saw, the print of a bare foot in the soft earth of the flower-bed. We had a man who lived in the barn, a sort of caretaker, and I imagined it must be the print of his foot, though what he

would be doing in his bare feet I hadn't the slightest idea.

We went into the house. They liked it and kept saying: "We'll take this right away. It's such a find."

They would have taken it, too, if I hadn't opened the door of the southern room. I opened the door, and we stood for a minute on the threshold looking before we went in.

The sight that met our eyes struck us speechless! A tall, broad-shouldered man, painted a bright red, and clad only in a bath-towel, danced round the far end of the room, waving a palm-leaf in each hand. He reminded me of his satanic majesty!

When he saw us he stopped short and stared for a moment. Then, with a quick movement, he picked up a flower-pot and, giving a fiendish yell, hurled it at us. I managed to close the door before it reached us, and we four ran madly down-stairs. As I jumped the last two steps, I heard the patter of his bare feet as he ran after us.

We flung ourselves out of doors, and into the auto. I cranked up the machine, and in record-breaking time we were going full speed down the drive.

We turned the corner by the gate, and I managed to bring the car to a stop just in time to prevent us from running down five or six men, who scattered right and left as we came on them. As I stopped one of them came and asked me if I had seen anything of an insane man.

I was about to say no when it dawned on me that the man we were flying from was insane. We went back, and after a tussle they managed to subdue the fellow. He had escaped while one of the nurses was giving him a bath, and parties had been searching for him all morning.

He was the "star boarder," and his care was worth five thousand a year, the doctor who owned the place told us.

As Ethel said afterward, fancy being a "star boarder" in a lunatic asylum!

The doctor got a carriage, and after thanking us profoundly, and telling us what a beautiful place it was, left us.

His thanks and his praise didn't do us any good, for the young couple decided they didn't want the place. She was sure that it was an ill-omen to meet a lunatic.

I certainly did feel discouraged, and Ethel cried a bit over the incident. The days dragged on—they were dark ones for us. At last we only had four days in which to sell the place. We tried to tell each other that we were better off without all the money, but in our hearts we felt mighty bad at having to let it go.

A friend of mine said it would be an easy thing to break the will. He said it would be easy enough to prove by his actions that uncle was not in his right mind. We considered it, and Ethel said no, but I am sure she would have given in if something hadn't happened.

There were just two days left. We were at breakfast when the door-bell rang. I answered it myself, and found it was the doctor that we had met the time the lunatic had spoiled the sale. I invited him to come in, wondering what he wanted with us.

"It is rather early for a call," he said, "but I have to leave the city at noon, for the South. I am going to bring back two insane women with me. I suppose you wonder what that has to do with you. Well, what I want to know is whether you will now consider an offer for your house at Pineville?"

Consider! We both shook with excitement at the word.

"I am a little crowded where I am, and I need a larger place, and the grounds round your place are the kind I want."

We told him we would be very willing to sell, and asked him how much he would pay.

"Eighteen thousand cash."

We had been asking twenty, but eighteen cash was very acceptable.

We had had the title searched, and everything was in readiness for the necessary papers to be signed. Ethel went and fussed up a bit, and then we went downtown to the lawyer's.

All the way down the doctor praised the house. How thankful I was to the insane gentleman for taking refuge in our happy home.

Before eleven the whole matter was settled. The doctor departed for his train, and Ethel and I stood for a moment on the steps of the building, thinking it over.

I must say I didn't feel any different now that I was a really truly millionaire.

Ethel broke the spell.

"Well, Bob," she said, "just give me some of that money you got from the house, will you. I want to start spending my share of that birthright of mine on some new clothes. Real clothes! And don't you think that to-night we'd better cele-

brate by having dinner at one of the hotels?"

"Yes," I answered. "And as soon as I can settle up my business, I think we had better take a trip and 'do Europe.' An ocean voyage ought to do us both good."

"Yes, but I think we need a nerve tonic more. I do, at any rate. Thank Heaven, I'll be able to sleep in peace to-night and not have to worry over that old place."

"No," I said, laughing, "that won't bother you any more, and just think what fun we will have telling our grandchildren how we sold our heritage."

A Siren of Seats.

A MYSTERY STORY IN TWO PARTS.

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR.

Part II.

And This Is the Real Reason Why Jimmy Stayed Away from the Theater.

TWO hours later — she waited that long in order to allow the liner to get some distance out to sea—Lucy sent the first of her series of wireless messages to her husband. It read:

MR. JAMES HAMILTON, SECOND CABIN, STEAMSHIP LACONIA:
Are you quite sure scarf-pin is in trunk? Better think again. LUCY.

In accordance with her plan she took care not to make this first message too violent. It was to consist of just a vague hint of her suspicions and therefore she thought the above just about right.

The very mention of the cat's-head pin, which (she felt positive) he had given to the blond usher, was bound to make him uneasy.

An hour later this reply came to her:

Scarf-pin all right. Don't worry. Lots of love from JIMMIE.

She was exceedingly disappointed by his answer. Apparently he had not been disconcerted at all by her message. Was he so dense that he had failed to see the point? That certainly was not like Jimmie. He was usually very quick at grasping things.

Her second message was considerably more to the point.

"This one is bound to startle him, I guess," she said to herself with a grim smile. It read:

MR. JAMES HAMILTON, SECOND CABIN, STEAMSHIP LACONIA:
The blond usher's hair comes out.
LUCY.

The reply which came back to her by wireless caused an angry exclamation to escape from her lips. It read:

Too bad. Please convey my sympathy. Lovingly, JIMMIE.

"The deceitful wretch!" she exclaimed. "He is trying to make me believe that he doesn't understand. I'll let him know that it is no use dissembling with me." She sent a third wireless, as follows:

MR. JAMES HAMILTON, SECOND CABIN, STEAMSHIP LACONIA:
You may be surprised to learn that I know everything. LUCY.

She pictured to herself the consternation that would come to him when he received this startling announcement. She expected

an humble, penitent, and imploring reply. This is what actually came:

Doesn't surprise me at all, dearest. Always knew you were a smart woman. Lovingly,
JIMMIE.

Her cheeks flamed with rage as she perused this message.

"Oh, the brute!" she gasped. "This defiant and impudent answer shows that he has made up his mind to brazen it out. The contemptible coward!

"Before he sailed he was scared out of his wits, but now that he is on the seas he has suddenly grown very brave in his attitude toward me. What a fool I was to think that I could make him uneasy by those messages. I might have known that he wouldn't care."

She made up her mind to send him one more wireless. This should be the last one. She went to the telegraph office once more, and seizing a telegram blank wrote so fiercely that the scratching of the pen across the paper sounded like the hiss of a snake:

JAMES HAMILTON, SECOND CABIN, STEAMSHIP LACONIA:
Am going to see lawyer to-day.
MRS. LUCY HAMILTON.

She regarded what she had written with grim satisfaction.

Perhaps, after all, this would stagger him. Maybe he was laboring under the impression that she was one of those meek, spiritless wives who would submit to anything rather than go through the divorce court. If so, this message would show him that he was mistaken.

She awaited his reply with great anxiety. It read:

Give him my regards. JIMMIE.

Then she knew that all was over forever between them. She had half hoped that when he learned that she was about to consult an attorney with the object of starting divorce proceedings he would become panic-stricken at the thought of losing her, and would send her a message imploring her not to take such a step.

If he had done this, and had manifested a proper amount of contrition, she might have forgiven him—even then. But now her heart was steeled against him. She was quite sure that she never wanted to see or hear from him again. He might become repentant later on when he had had time to think what a good wife she had always been to him. He might write to her then asking her to forgive him; but if so, she would return his letter unopened.

She sobbed for three hours after receiving his last taunting reply. Then she put on her hat, dabbed some powder on her face, and went down-town to the office of a lawyer who had once handled a little lawsuit for her when she had sued a dyeing establishment for spoiling an evening gown.

This lawyer heard her story and informed her that he thought he could obtain a divorce for her.

"Let me ask you a few questions, madam," he said. "First, has your husband ever beaten you?"

"Never!" gasped Lucy.

"That's too bad," said the lawyer.

"Sir!" cried Lucy indignantly.

"I mean, of course, too bad as far as our divorce action is concerned. It is always so much better to be able to prove cruel and inhuman treatment in such cases. Maybe he has sworn at you quite frequently?"

"No," replied Lucy emphatically. "He never swears—at least, not at home. Jimmie is a gentleman—or was—until he met that horrid woman."

"Is he stingy?" inquired the lawyer hopefully. "Does he stint you on clothing-money and housekeeping funds, and so forth? Come, surely he did that?"

"No, I can't say that he did," replied Lucy with tears in her eyes. "Jimmie has always been very liberal with me. I have nothing whatever against him except his infatuation for that blond usher person."

"Well, I suppose we will have to confine ourselves to that issue," declared the man of law regretfully. "I guess it is no use beginning action until he returns from abroad. In the meantime, we must endeavor to find out the name of this other woman. I believe you said that you did not know her name?"

"No, but it ought to be an easy matter to find out," replied Lucy. "They would know her name, of course, at the Hyperion Theater where she is employed."

"I will send my clerk there to make inquiries," said the attorney.

The next day she received a letter from him. It informed her that his clerk had learned that the name of the blond usher was Miss Margaret Ayres, and that she lived in a boarding-house on West Twenty-

Third Street—the house number was unknown to the manager of the theater.

"My clerk also learned," the lawyer's letter went on, "that the young woman resigned her situation at the Hyperion Theater yesterday, stating that she was about to leave the city."

This information caused a startling thought to enter Lucy's head. Was it possible that the blond usher was on the Laconia sailing to Europe with Jimmie?

This idea had not occurred to her before. She realized now that it was not at all improbable that such was the case. True, Lucy had not seen her when she had gone to the boat to see her husband sail, but that did not prove by any means that she was not on board. She might have shut herself up in her stateroom until the liner had weighed anchor in order to avoid detection.

She called her lawyer on the telephone and told him of her suspicions. He agreed with her that it was not at all unlikely that such was the case. Needless to say, Lucy's heart was not made any lighter by this distressing thought.

At the end of the week—the most miserable week that Lucy had ever spent—she received a cablegram which had been sent from Liverpool, England: It read:

> Arrived safely. Fondest love from
>
> JIMMIE.

"Good Heavens!" she gasped. "What a cruel trick! Hasn't he done me injury enough without rubbing it in like this? What can he mean by it?"

A sudden thought caused her eyes to flash with indignation.

"Maybe that woman put him up to this piece of meanness. Maybe she stood at his side while he wrote this taunting cablegram. Oh, it is unbearable to think of it!"

She went down-town to show this astonishing missive to her lawyer. On the Elevated train she met that notorious gossip, Mrs. Jessop.

"How do you do, my dear?" exclaimed the latter, taking a seat beside her. "And how is your dear husband? By the way, talking of him, I knew I was right the other day when I said I saw him in a taxicab with a blond woman whose head was on his shoulder."

"What makes you so sure that you were right?" demanded Lucy stiffly.

"Because I saw them together again today," she replied with a triumphant smile.

"Wh-a-a-t!" gasped Lucy. "To-day? Why, that's impossible!"

"Is it, my dear? Not a bit of it. I tell you I saw your husband this afternoon walking on West Twenty-Third Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues with that same woman. I was over there visiting a friend who lives in one of those queer old houses on the West Side, and I ran into your husband and that blond—"

"But I tell you it's impossible," protested Lucy. "My husband is in Europe. I got a cablegram from him this morning, sent from Liverpool."

"I don't care if you got six cablegrams, my dear," retorted Mrs. Jessop firmly. "I shall still insist in believing the evidence of my eyes. He may have been in Liverpool this morning, if you say so, but I am quite positive that he was on West Twenty-Third Street this afternoon with that blond woman who—"

"But how could he have crossed the Atlantic in a few hours?" argued Lucy.

"Maybe he used one of those new-fangled air-ships which go a hundred miles an hour," suggested Mrs. Jessop affably. "I don't know how he could have done it, but the fact remains that I saw him with that—"

"You must have been mistaken," declared Lucy with positiveness. "It must have been some one who resembled him."

"Not a bit of it," was the indignant reply. "You made me believe that once, my dear, but you can't get me to do so a second time. I tell you it was your own husband and nobody else. Why, he was wearing that very scarf-pin which you gave him on his last birthday. You remember I was along with you when you bought it—a golden cat's head with diamond eyes."

"He wearing that pin?" gasped Lucy. "Can it be possible that you are right? Good Heavens! What can it mean?"

By the time she reached home she had persuaded herself that Mrs. Jessop must be mistaken. How else could those wireless messages and that cablegram from Liverpool be explained? And besides, hadn't Lucy seen him sail on the Laconia?

But when she opened the door of her flat and stepped into the private hall, a man, tall, very pale-faced, but smiling happily, came toward her and took her in his arms.

"Jimmie—you!" she screamed, and her head fell limply upon his shoulder.

"Brace up, little girl," he said. "I was a selfish fool to have sprung upon you as

suddenly as that. I ought to have prepared you for this. Brace up, dear. Don't go and faint now. Please don't!"

She opened her eyes and her bewildered gaze fell upon a golden cat's head with one diamond eye which glittered in his cravat.

"But how can you be here when you are in Europe?" she cried with a hysterical laugh. "What does this mean, Jimmie?"

"I never went to Europe," he answered with a smile. "I didn't go farther than Sandy Hook. I left the liner there and came back on the pilot boat."

"What for?" she demanded, and suddenly broke fiercely away from him. "Don't touch me, sir. Don't come near me. I was forgetting about that blond usher creature. I presume you came back to be with her?"

"Yes, I came back to be with her," he answered with a smile that was not a guilty one. "But hear my explanation, please, girlie, before you get angry with me."

"You had better make your explanation to my lawyer," she retorted haughtily. "I presume you have come back home because you have grown tired of her and have decided to leave her? But—"

"Not at all," he answered. "I have come back to you, dear, because she and I have just been discharged from the Pasteur Institute."

"The Pasteur Institute!" gasped Lucy. "The place where they cure hydrophobia?"

"Exactly. That poor girl and I were both bitten by a savage dog that night I took you to the Hyperion Theater. We thought the dog was mad, and have been under observation at the Pasteur Institute ever since."

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "But I don't understand, Jimmie. There is still a whole lot to explain."

"I had better begin at the beginning," he said, as he took her into the living-room and sat her down in a Morris chair. "It all began with this cat's-head pin—or rather, to be more exact, it began with my attending the matinée performance at the Hyperion Theater the same day I took you in the evening."

"What!" she gasped. "You went to that same show twice in one day?"

"Yes. The boss asked me to take a customer—a woman customer—there that afternoon, and of course I couldn't refuse.

"This woman customer was at least sixty years old, and there was no harm in my taking her; but knowing how absurdly jealous you are, my dear, I decided not to say anything about it to you."

"And that was why you tried to persuade me to choose another play that evening?" exclaimed Lucy.

"Yes. Naturally, I didn't care to see the same show twice in one day, and besides I had the misfortune to lose my scarf-pin in the theater that afternoon.

"The theater people hunted high and low for it, but couldn't find it. I was afraid that if I returned to the Hyperion that same night some of them might recognize and speak to me about the pin in front of you, which would have been embarrassing."

"That's why you didn't want to sit on the left side of the house?"

"Yes. I was sitting on the left side that afternoon, and I was anxious to avoid those ushers."

"And how did that—that blond usher come to have the pin on her blouse that evening?" demanded Lucy.

"Ah, you noticed that, did you?" said Jimmie. "I didn't think you had. She found the pin and decided to keep it. She hadn't been there that afternoon when I lost it, and didn't know to whom it belonged.

"When I saw it on her I was surprised, and also puzzled how to get it from her without putting you wise.

"Between the acts I went out, as you may remember, and told her the pin was mine. She refused to give it to me, and tried to bluff me that she had had it for years. I threatened her with arrest, but she didn't seem to care.

"At the next intermission, as you know, I went out again to argue with her.

"She had obtained permission from the manager to leave early that night, and had just stepped out of the theater and was walking up Broadway when I overtook her and once more demanded my pin.

"While we were talking, there was a cry of 'mad dog,' and before either of us could move a savage-looking bull-terrier with foam dripping from its jaws had bitten us both.

"We were both placed in a taxicab by some of the crowd that gathered and rushed to the hospital to have our wounds cauterized. The girl fainted with fear on our way there."

"That is why her head was on his shoulder," said Lucy to herself with a sigh of relief.

"I got back from the hospital in time to take you home from the theater," Jimmie went on, "and knowing how very nervous you are, dear, I decided to say nothing to you about that dog.

"I was deadly scared myself, I must admit, at the possibility of getting hydrophobia, and I wanted to take treatment at the Pasteur Institute without delay. For this reason I didn't care to sail for Europe the next day.

"In order that you shouldn't be alarmed, however, I decided to let you think that I had sailed."

"That was the reason you didn't want me to accompany you to the boat?" said Lucy with a penitent smile.

"Sure thing. And when you insisted I was at my wit's end until I thought of the plan of coming back on the pilot-boat.

"The dog, by the way, was caught alive and has been under observation at the board of health until to-day, when it was decided that he had no sign of rabies.

"When the girl usher and I heard the good news we left the Pasteur Institute, and I came home immediately."

"But there is one thing still unexplained," cried Lucy, still in a doubtful frame of mind. "Those wireless messages — who sent them to me from the boat and dared to sign your name to them?"

"Oh, I guess they came from my friend Billy Saunders, who sailed on the Laconia," replied Jimmie. "I explained the situation to him and made him promise to help me make you believe that I was on board. A mighty fine fellow is Billy Saunders."

"Is he?" retorted Lucy bitterly. "I think he is perfectly hateful."

Mr. Scales Scores at Last.

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE.

Although Our Old Friend the Worm Really Doesn't Turn, Mr. Butterworth Succeeds in Including Him in a "Right About."

MR. SCALES, entering his home late in the afternoon, tired and somewhat out of humor, missed the accustomed greeting of his wife in the hall, and, hearing the sound of voices in his study, hung up his hat and coat with a gesture of impatience and made his way up-stairs.

He paused cautiously outside the door, but the only sounds which fell on his ears were the voices of his wife and her dearest friend, Mrs. Butterworth, engaged apparently in animated conversation. Reassured, Mr. Scales turned the handle and walked into the room. To his surprise and confusion, the first object on which his eyes rested was the form of a tall woman of middle age, who stood with one hand lightly resting on the back of an armchair, and gazed with an air of benevolence on Mrs. Scales and Mrs. Butterworth, who were standing in ecstatic admiration in front of three large posterlike pictures suspended from the plate-rail.

The tall stranger was attired in a robe of dark gray, which fell in almost unbroken lines from shoulder to ankle, but her magnificent figure and queenly carriage enabled her to wear with grace a garment which on most women would have presented more the appearance of a sack than a dress.

Mr. Scales, glancing from the stranger to the pictures on the wall, noticed that the female figures there depicted were habited in garments of a similar cut, one being attired in gray, another in blue velvet, and the third in some white fabric.

"Oh, George!" cried Mrs. Scales. "I am so glad you have come. I want to introduce you to Mrs. Bellairs."

Mr. Scales bowed constrainedly, and dropped his eyes before a piercing glance from a pair of dark orbs which flashed with

extreme brilliance beneath a broad, white forehead surmounted by a coronal of raven-black hair.

"Mrs. Bellairs," continued Mrs. Scales, "is an apostle of dress reform. She has only been in the city a little over six months, and already she is beginning to number her converts by the score. Mrs. Butterworth and I attended a little lecture she gave this afternoon, and she agreed to come back with us and explain a little more of the hygienic advantages of this style of dress."

Mrs. Scales pointed to the pictures, and Mr. Scales regarded them with a disparaging eye.

"I suppose that's about all that can be said in its favor?" he said.

"Why, George!" cried Mrs. Scales indignantly. "Where is your artistic eye that I have heard you brag about? These costumes are the very acme of grace. Mrs. Bellairs, would you mind walking across the room and let my husband see how beautifully your dress falls?"

Mrs. Bellairs, with an indulgent smile, complied. She walked with a swimming grace of movement, manipulating her skirt with a dexterity evidently born of long practise, and Mr. Scales was compelled grudgingly to admit that his artistic eye was favorably impressed.

"It looks uncommonly well on you," he said. "The question is how would it look on women who have not got your—ahem—advantages?"

Mrs. Bellairs acknowledged the compliment with a slight bow.

"Unless," she said, "a woman has some deformity, or her figure is quite impossible, she will appear to greater advantage in this reform costume than in any other. Under the ridiculous dictates of modern fashion the female form is twisted and distorted out of all semblance to the mold in which nature created it.

"Look at the women of ancient Greece, the sculptor's ideal. The perfection of shape is largely due to the loose and flowing garments they wore. Of course, you have never studied anatomy?"

Mr. Scales shook his head, and Mrs. Bellairs, with the zeal of the true propagandist, launched into a dissertation which at times made her auditor feel decidedly uncomfortable. He punctuated her lecture with perfunctory "just so's," "no doubt's," and "of course's," but manifested considerable relief when she had concluded, and assisted her to roll up her pictures preparatory to departure with an alacrity which was scarcely complimentary.

"You will remember the address, of course," said Mrs. Bellairs smilingly to Mrs. Scales as she assumed a turbanlike headgear, and Mrs. Scales with an answering smile displayed a scrap of paper containing a word or two and several figures.

"I thought it safest to write it down," she said, and Mrs. Bellairs, with a graceful bow to the husband, swept from the room escorted by her two disciples.

"What address was that woman talking about?" demanded Mr. Scales suspiciously when his wife and her friend returned. "I hope you don't intend to strike up a friendship with a faker like that?"

"Mrs. Bellairs," responded Mrs. Scales with a lofty air, "is a very superior woman, and any one might be glad to cultivate her friendship, and as for the address—it is that of the dressmaker who is going to design some of these costumes for Mrs. Butterworth and me."

"What!" shouted Mr. Scales. "Do you mean to say that you are going to make yourself ridiculous by going about in a glorified bean-sack, and all because a woman who would look well in a bedquilt cons you into the belief that you will carry it with distinction?

"Why"—and while he addressed his wife his glance included Mrs. Butterworth—"with your figure you could no more wear one of those things and not look like a scarecrow in a comic opera than I could."

"Really, George," replied Mrs. Scales heatedly, while Mrs. Butterworth, conscious that she had been included in this uncomplimentary comparison, elevated her chin with an air of disdain. "Really, I must say that for downright rudeness you are hard to beat. I was not aware that Mrs. Butterworth and I were so hopelessly misshapen."

"I never said anything of the kind," replied the incensed Mr. Scales. "You always manage to distort my remarks. What I said was that you couldn't carry one of those dresses and look decent, and I mean it. That Mrs. What's-her-name has one of the finest figures I ever saw. Anything would look well on her."

Mrs. Scales heaved a sigh the expansiveness of which was only restrained by twentieth-century restrictions.

"Of course," she said plaintively, "I might have known it."

"Known what?" demanded Mr. Scales explosively.

"That you would prefer the physical attractions of any woman before those of your wife?" replied Mrs. Scales with an exaggerated air of resignation.

Mr. Scales relieved his overwrought feelings by several *sotto voce* expletives and flung out of the room, while Mrs. Scales and Mrs. Butterworth exchanged meaning smiles behind his back.

II.

It was fully half an hour after dinner had been concluded, a meal which had been consumed by Mr. Scales in sulky silence, and by his wife with an air of dignified composure, that the former again brought up the subject of dress reform.

"Where are you intending to get these precious meal-sacks built?" he inquired disagreeably. "I shouldn't think it would require much art or experience to cut out and stitch those things together."

"That's just where you are mistaken, George," replied Mrs. Scales. "It requires the very highest art to give them individuality, and the correct sweep of line to do justice to the figure."

Mr. Scales emitted a short laugh expressive of contempt.

"I don't know, George," said Mrs. Scales icily, "whether that cackle is meant to disparage my figure or dress reform; but whichever it is, I must say that you are extremely rude. Mrs. Bellairs says—and even you must admit that a person who has made a close study of a subject is better qualified to speak on it than a person like you, who doesn't know a blessed thing about it—Mrs. Bellairs says that it is absolutely necessary that we go to a woman who thoroughly understands the making of these costumes, or that we shall bring ridicule on the movement."

"Well, don't do that, whatever you do," replied Mr. Scales sarcastically. "Poor thing—it's ridiculous enough already."

"So," continued Mrs. Scales, ignoring this interruption, "Mrs. Butterworth and I have decided to go to Mme. Planchette, who has recently opened an establishment on Alabama Avenue. Mrs. Bellairs recommends her most highly; in fact, she makes for all her pupils."

"And I suppose," said Mr. Scales grumpily, "that she will stick you fifteen or twenty dollars apiece for those outrages."

Mrs. Scales smiled in a superior manner.

"Really, George," she said. "What you don't know about some things would make a whole library. Whoever heard anything so absurd. She is an artist, not a common dressmaker."

"In the name of Heaven, then," burst out Mr. Scales, with a sudden qualm of misgiving, "how much does she charge?"

"For the making of a costume of ordinary material," replied Mrs. Scales, "she charges sixty dollars. Of course, that does not include the cost of the goods. And for velvet and silk, her charge is eighty dollars."

Mr. Scales, sinking back in his chair, stared at his wife with horror depicted on every lineament of his expressive countenance.

"And do you mean to tell me—" he was beginning in a choked voice, when Mrs. Scales interrupted him.

"Mrs. Butterworth and I," she went on placidly, "think that we will content ourselves with three dresses each at first. Tweed, velvet, and silk."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Scales, with grim politeness. "You think three will be enough for a starter. That's not a bad idea. You can add to them a dozen or two at a time, as you need them, and get used to people grinning at you in the street."

"Really, George—" Mrs. Scales was commencing indignantly when the sound of voices was heard in the hall, and the next minute Mrs. Butterworth, accompanied by her husband, looking in his evening clothes and immaculate linen as if he had just come out of a bandbox, entered the room.

The countenance of Mr. Butterworth, which usually conveyed the impression that he was thoroughly well satisfied with himself and the world in general, wore a perturbed expression; and when Mrs. Scales had borne off his wife to discuss in privacy their new ideals in dress, he unbosomed himself to Mr. Scales, his long-time friend.

"I suppose," he said, "that you've heard all about this infernal new fad that your wife and mine have taken up?"

Mr. Scales pointed to a decanter and a siphon on a side table, and a box of cigars on the desk.

"Help yourself," he said, "and then fill one for me, and give me a cigar. We've got to figure out some way of putting on the brakes, and a little stimulant won't hurt us."

Mr. Butterworth complied, and the two

husbands, each with a cigar between his lips and a tumbler convenient at his elbow, settled themselves alongside the table to a diplomatic conference.

"It seems to me," began Mr. Butterworth, "that the simplest thing to do is just to forbid any such folly."

"Oh," commented Mr. Scales, "that's your idea, is it? Did you ever forbid your wife to do anything yet she wanted?"

"N-n-o," replied Mr. Butterworth, after a moment's pause for thought. "I don't think I ever did."

"Then," said Mr. Scales, "take my advice, and don't try it."

His tone had all the confidence of experience, and his friend, after waiting in vain for a little further enlightenment, inquired:

"Did you?"

"I did," replied Mr. Scales grimly. "And I don't want ever to try it again."

"What happened?" inquired the other in an awed voice.

"Everything," replied Mr. Scales, with an expressive wave of the hand. "I never put in such a time in my life. No—no—Butterworth, this is a case of diplomacy."

"I'm not kicking at the expense," said Mr. Butterworth.

"I am," replied Mr. Scales decidedly. "I'm not a pauper, but I draw the line at paying out several hundred dollars to make my wife look ridiculous. And I don't suppose you want your wife going around looking like a clothes-prop stuck in a meal-sack."

Mr. Butterworth, while willing to admit the correctness of the simile so far as costume was concerned, seemed inclined to resent the comparison of his wife's slim and somewhat angular figure to a clothes-prop, but Mr. Scales gave him no time to express dissent.

"We've got to stop it," he said with decision. "Just how we are going to do it, I don't know as yet. If the worst comes to the worst, I am going to start a men's dress reform movement myself, and rig myself out in a hygienic suit that will make my wife's look like the latest Parisian model.

"In the meanwhile, I am going to make a few inquiries about this Mrs. Bellairs. And you might do a little gum-shoe work on the same lines yourself."

Mr. Butterworth, in a somewhat hopeless tone of voice, promised to render every assistance possible; and the return of Mrs. Scales and Mrs. Butterworth, animatedly discussing the respective merits of serge and homespun, put an end to the colloquy.

III.

MR. BUTTERWORTH, dropping into Mr. Scales's real-estate office on the following afternoon, was impressed by a look of latent triumph on his friend's countenance.

"You look pretty well satisfied with yourself," he said. "What's happened? Put through a million-dollar deal?"

Mr. Scales waved the other to a chair and, rising carefully, closed the door into the outer office.

"I've been doing a little work on that dress-reform game," he said; "and I think—mind you, I'm not sure, but I think—that I've got onto something."

"Well," said Mr. Butterworth, after waiting for more information and growing impatient, "don't look so confoundedly mysterious. What have you discovered?"

"I found out," replied Mr. Scales, somewhat dashed by his friend's imperious manner—"I found out that the rent of that store on Alabama Avenue occupied by this Mme. Planchette has been paid by check."

"What about it?" demanded Mr. Butterworth. "I don't see anything very remarkable in that. Lots of people pay their rent by check. If that's all you've discovered, you might have saved your time."

"But that isn't all," replied Mr. Scales.

"Then, why don't you say what you have found out," said the other testily. "One would think, to look at you, that you were the Delphic Oracle or the Sphinx reincarnated."

"I have discovered," replied Mr. Scales, speaking with great deliberation, and interpolating hyphens between his words by taps of his forefinger on his desk—"I have discovered that, with the exception of one month, when the rent was paid in cash, the check was drawn by Mrs. Bellairs."

Mr. Butterworth emitted a long whistle expressive of surprise and comprehension.

"Of course," continued Mr. Scales, "there is a possibility that the dressmaker received the check from Mrs. Bellairs in the way of business and indorsed it over; but the fact that in each case it is made out for the exact amount makes that possibility very remote."

"Then, as I make it out," responded Mr. Butterworth, "what you imply is that Mrs. Bellairs and this Mme. Planchette are in collusion to skin the confiding women of

this little burgh out of their husbands' hard-earned money."

"My dear Butterworth," replied Mr. Scales, "I have always said that perspicacity was one of your leading characteristics."

"It's certainly a skin game," said Mr. Butterworth, after silently considering the situation from various points of view. "But it's not criminal, so far as I see. We can't call in the police."

"We don't need the police," replied Mr. Scales impatiently. "All we've got to do is to confirm our suspicions, and, if they are correct, we'll find a way of putting a match to the little powder magazine and blow Mrs. Bellairs so high she'll never come down again."

"And how," queried Mr. Butterworth, "do you propose to confirm your suspicions?"

"That," replied Mr. Scales, "is something on which I want your advice."

Both men sat silent for some minutes, revolving schemes for the unmasking of Mrs. Bellairs; and at last Mr. Butterworth spoke.

"I've got it," he said with an air of triumph. "Simplest thing in the world. We'll go up and interview this Mme. Planchette."

"Very simple," sneered Mr. Scales; "but not half as simple as you are, Butterworth. I suppose you think all we have to do is to go to this dressmaker and ask her whether Mrs. Bellairs is in partnership with her."

"If," replied Mr. Butterworth with dignity, "you would restrain your natural inclination to verbosity, and a mistaken idea that you know it all before you are told, you would understand that I don't mean anything of the kind. What I propose is this: we will go to see her together; I as a lawyer, and you as a capitalist client. Of course, we won't say so in so many words, but leave her to infer it."

Mr. Scales grunted.

"I suppose you think," he said with asperity, "that it will only need one glance at your intellectual countenance to lead her to the conclusion that you are one of the leading lights of the bar."

"And at that shabby coat you will persist in wearing," responded Mr. Butterworth with equal acerbity, "to convince her that you are a capitalist. Listen, and don't interrupt so much.

"I propose simply to introduce you as a client with money to invest in a promising business. If Mrs. Bellairs has no interest, Mme. Planchette will deal with us direct; but if she has, the woman will have to admit that she will need to consult her partner, and it won't tax my diplomatic powers, though it might yours, to worm out of her who that partner is."

"It's not a bad idea, Butterworth," admitted Mr. Scales, "though it does emanate from you. It's worth trying."

"Then let's try it at once," said the other, satisfied with this grudging tribute.

Mr. Scales picked up his desk telephone.

"I'll call a taxicab," he said.

Mr. Butterworth threw up his hands in affected despair.

"Taxi!" he cried. "My dear Scales, you know nothing about dressing an act. Call up the Spink garage, and tell them to send the biggest and smartest touring-car they have. Capitalists may wear shabby coats, but they always travel in expensive cars."

IV.

THE exterior of Mme. Planchette's establishment on Alabama Avenue was a model of refinement and dignity.

There was no attempt at garish display. A neat brass plate on a solid mahogany door bore the name, and the window, draped with costly curtains, revealed in the background one dress-reform costume of subdued hue falling in graceful lines from the shoulders of a lay figure.

Mme. Planchette, a moon-faced, willowy woman of uncertain age, and with hair which spoke eloquently of peroxide, received Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth in a small parlor admirably in keeping with the rest of the establishment. A costly Turkish rug covered the floor; the furniture was massive and of antique fashion, and the walls, decorated with stamped leather, bore several paintings of undeniable merit.

The dressmaker, attired in a sweeping robe of sapphire velvet, and with one taper forefinger resting on an escritoire, stood with slightly raised eyebrows awaiting an explanation of the visit, which was not at once forthcoming, both Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth betraying some embarrassment.

"We have come," said the latter at last, "on a little matter of business."

Madame waved her visitors to seats and sank onto a low divan.

"Pray state it," she replied in a voice

melodious, but with no trace of accent excepting the faintest suspicion of an Irish brogue. "But please remember that I am not a business woman. I am a dressmaker."

"The fact of the matter is," said Mr. Butterworth, assuming his most engaging smile, "that my client here"—he indicated Mr. Scales with a wave of the arm, and the latter did his best to assume the air of a man with millions behind him—"is looking for some good investments. He is anxious to put some money into a good, progressive business; and, judging by the forward strides of the dress-reform movement, this seems to him—and, I may say, to me—a venture which is bound to yield good results, if properly expanded."

Mr. Butterworth paused, and Mme. Planchette acknowledged the overture with a slight bow.

"I understand," she said, "you are anxious to put some capital into this business. I am much complimented, but—I am not alone in it."

"We are fully aware of that," replied Mr. Butterworth, repressing with some difficulty an impulse to glance at his companion. "We are aware, like a good many others, that Mrs. Bellairs has a large, if not a controlling, interest; but we thought it best to come to you first, as the nominal, if not the actual, head of the business."

Madame bowed again.

"And how much money did you propose to invest?" she asked.

Mr. Butterworth left the reply to Mr. Scales, and that gentleman, with a rather poorly assumed air of indifference to small amounts, replied carelessly.

"Oh, not much—about a hundred thousand dollars."

Mme. Planchette gasped.

"A hundred thousand?" she ejaculated. "That is a great deal."

"Now, what we want to know," said Mr. Butterworth hastily, afraid that Mr. Scales might destroy the impression he had created by some tactless remark—"what we want to know is, had we best leave it to you to sound Mrs. Bellairs on the subject, or would it be better for us to see her personally, carrying your approval of or dissent to the proposition?"

Mme. Planchette was taken off her guard.

"I think," she said, while her pale eyes rested on Mr. Scales with a look almost of adoration—"I think you had better let me deal with Mrs. Briscoe. How foolish! I mean, Mrs. Bellairs. I will talk over your proposal with her and let you know. I don't know whether she will entertain it: The profits are large. In New York—"

Madame stopped suddenly, as if conscious that she was talking too freely.

"If you will call again, say, in two days," she said, "I shall be able to give you a definite answer, in all probability."

Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth whirled away from their interview, exchanged glances of triumph, and the latter, in the exuberance of his satisfaction, squeezed his friend's knee so hard as to elicit a protest.

"How's that," he inquired, "as a little bit of diplomacy on the part of yours truly? I think I did that pretty well."

"There is no occasion to dislocate my knee-cap, even if you did," replied Mr. Scales, rubbing his leg. "And, besides, I don't see that all the credit belongs to you. That touch of mine about the hundred thousand is what did the trick. It threw her clean off her balance, and made her give the whole thing away. The question now is, what use are we going to make of the information?"

"There's one little bit of information which *madame* let slip which it might be well to follow up," said Mr. Butterworth meditatively.

Mr. Scales looked inquiringly at his friend.

"Beyond the fact that Mrs. Bellairs is a partner or sole owner of the business," he said, "I don't see that we got anything."

"Quite likely not," replied Mr. Butterworth. "You haven't got the analytical mind, Scales. You can see a thing, if it is stuck in front of your nose, but not much farther. You didn't happen to notice, I suppose, that *madame* inadvertently spoke of Mrs. Bellairs as Mrs. Briscoe, and that she let drop that they had been doing business in New York."

"I didn't notice it," replied Mr. Scales somewhat sulkily. "And I don't see that there is anything very much in it."

"Maybe not," said the other; "but it is worth a try, anyway. Chauffeur, go round by the Northern Union Telegraph offices."

Mr. Scales looked the inquiry which he disdained to voice, and Mr. Butterworth was kind enough to volunteer an explanation.

"A friend of mine," he said, "is one of the head men in the criminal investigation

department in New York. I am going to send him a wire asking if he knows anything of the antecedents of a Mrs. Briscoe. There is just a chance that the woman, who is undoubtedly an adventuress, has been mixed up with the police at some time in her career. You can drop me at the telegraph office, and I will see you later at your office."

"Quite a *Sherlock Holmes,*" commented Mr. Scales sarcastically, but inwardly admiring his friend's resourcefulness. "I suppose you have got a gray dressing-gown and a cocain-squirt at home."

Mr. Butterworth smiled indulgently.

"My dear Scales," he said, as the car drew up at the curb and he descended, "if I am a *Sherlock Holmes,* you would make an admirable *Watson. Watson,* you may remember, could never see the slightest connection between incidents until *Sherlock Holmes* had hammered it into his head with a pile-driver."

The swinging doors of the telegraph office had closed behind Mr. Butterworth before Mr. Scales could think of a suitable retort.

Two hours later Mr. Butterworth entered Mr. Scales's office and threw two slips of yellow paper on that gentleman's desk.

"Read that," he said curtly.

Mr. Scales, with a glance at his friend's countenance, which had assumed a sphinx-like impassivity, complied, and read as follows:

Mrs. Briscoe—alias Vansittart—alias Hodgson, ran dress-reform parlor here last year with woman named Aileen Grainger. Nothing known against latter. Briscoe held here on suspicion of connection with confidence game, but released for lack of evidence.

Served year in Detroit for fake mine promotion. Six months in Toronto, Canada, for false pretenses. Wanted in Baltimore for passing forged checks. Description: Middle-aged—tall—good, rather full, figure—dark hair and eyes—slight scar between eyebrows and on left wrist.

QUARREL.

Mr. Scales laid the papers on his desk and, whirling around in his swivel-chair, faced Mr. Butterworth.

"It's her, all right," he said decisively, if ungrammatically. "I distinctly noticed the scar on the forehead."

"Good for you, *Watson,*" replied the other. "And now, will you admit that I am something of a detective?"

Mr. Scales grunted a reluctant assent.

"The question now is," he said, "how are we going to spring the mine?"

"Leave that to me," replied Mr. Butterworth vaingloriously. "Leave it to your Uncle William. Trust him to dope out a *dénouement.* I've been running this game so far. You have been nothing but a supe. I'm going to bring it to a finish."

V.

"GEORGE," said Mrs. Scales the same evening, as Mr. Scales seated himself at the dinner-table and spread his napkin, "I have a nice little surprise for you."

"That so?" replied Mr. Scales, who was something of a gourmet. "Something new out of that cookery-book you bought the other day?"

"Cookery-book!" Mrs. Scales almost snorted in her disgust at this materialism. "You seem to think that eating is the main thing in life. This has nothing to do with cookery. I am going to take you to a lecture to-night."

"I will admit the surprise," replied Mr. Scales. "But I reserve the adjective until I hear what sort of a lecture it is."

"To-night," replied Mrs. Scales, "Mrs. Bellairs is giving one of her talks on dress reform. Mrs. Butterworth and I are going, and we have arranged that you and Mr. Butterworth shall escort us. I telephoned Mrs. Bellairs, and she says that, though it is not customary for men to attend her lectures, she will have no objection."

"Very kind of her," replied Mr. Scales scathingly, "considering that she expects to make a few hundred out of us, I should think she might be willing to tolerate our presence."

"My dear George," replied the wife, "I should be sorry to have your disposition. You seem unable to give anybody credit for disinterested motives. Mrs. Bellairs told us distinctly that she had absolutely no interest in this movement beyond that of a very enthusiastic propagandist—I am using her own words—and I believe what she says."

"If she told you that," said Mr. Scales, with a sudden inspiration, "I have no objection to attend her lecture, and I think I can answer for Butterworth."

He consumed his dinner with unusual haste and hurried up to his study, where he engaged in a few minutes of animated conversation with Mr. Butterworth through the telephone.

"Of course, you can do it," he said, ap-

parently in response to protests from the other end of the wire. "There couldn't be a better opportunity. There will be a whole bunch of them. It will be worth a fortune to see their faces— What's that?—Too shy?—My dear Butterworth, a man who has the gall of three canal horses shouldn't balk at a little thing like that— Eh?—All right. I'll leave it all to you. Work up any fireworks you like."

He hung up the receiver as his wife entered the room.

"I was just talking to Butterworth," he said, in reply to her inquiry. "He says he has no objection to go to this lecture tonight. In fact"—and he suppressed a grin with difficulty—"he rather expects to enjoy it."

Mrs. Scales's lips tightened into a thin line.

"And I expect you to enjoy it, too," she said meaningly.

Mr. Scales laughed harshly.

"I expect," he said, "to have one of the best times of my life."

VI.

THE small hall in which Mrs. Bellairs was wont to hold forth to her disciples was about three parts filled when Mrs. Scales and Mrs. Butterworth, escorted by their husbands, put in an appearance. Mrs. Bellairs herself, looking like a somewhat *passée* goddess in flowing folds of pale gray silk, received them at the entrance, and welcomed the two gentlemen with a great deal of manner.

"I wish," she said, flashing a brilliant smile first on Mr. Butterworth, who beamed back, and then on Mr. Scales, who met it with marked coolness—"I wish that more of the husbands of my converts would condescend to pay us a visit. A little male support would work wonders."

"You have worked wonders already, without any male help," replied Mr. Butterworth. "But I suppose that if a man were to get up on that platform and tell these ladies"—he indicated the assemblage with a sweep of the arm—"what a thoroughly sensible and artistic reform this new style of dress is, it might help on the movement."

"I am afraid"—and Mrs. Bellairs flashed another smile—"that that is rather past hoping for. I have not met with much encouragement from husbands so far."

"That," replied Mr. Butterworth, "is because husbands generally are a perverse and stiff-necked tribe. They affect to despise fashion, and yet they are slaves to it. I only wish I had a chance to tell these women what I think on the subject."

"My dear William," remonstrated Mrs. Butterworth, "have you gone crazy?"

"Not at all," replied 'Dear William.' "If Mrs. Bellairs would only give me the opportunity, I think I could make this little gathering sit up and take notice."

"If you only would," said Mrs. Bellairs effusively.

"Nothing I should like better," responded Mr. Butterworth; and Mrs. Bellairs, after expressing her acknowledgments, suggested that, after preliminary remarks by herself, he should present a few masculine impressions of the advantages of the new style.

"And perhaps," she added, "Mr. Scales would also like to say something."

"I should like to say a good deal," replied Mr. Scales, flushing darkly, "but not in public."

"I do hope, William," said Mrs. Butterworth, as Mrs. Bellairs turned away to greet some new arrivals, "that you are not going to play one of your stupid practical jokes."

"No stupid joke at all," replied Mr. Butterworth airily. "But the word 'practical' is all right."

In spite of her husband's assurance, Mrs. Butterworth looked decidedly uneasy; and when, after Mrs. Bellairs had announced from the platform that a male convert was about to address the audience, and Mr. Butterworth, looking like a fashion-plate in his faultless dress clothes and immaculate linen, had taken his place by her side, she gripped Mrs. Scales's hand hard.

"I do hope," she whispered in that lady's ear, "that William is not going to do anything silly. He really is silly at times."

"*S-sh-sh!*" said Mrs. Scales, with a warning pressure. "He is going to speak."

"Ladies," said Mr. Butterworth, waving a manicured hand on which sparkled a large diamond. "And"—he smiled pleasantly—"I may say that by 'ladies' I don't include that solitary gentleman who is sitting in the third row."

All eyes were turned on Mr. Scales, who blushed furiously, wriggled uneasily in his seat, and darted fiery glances at his friend.

"Ladies," continued Mr. Butterworth, "your excellent preceptress has kindly given me the opportunity of saying a few words on this new movement for reform in dress.

I am glad to be able to do so, and to inform you that, while you are improving your health and personal appearance in wearing the costume which she recommends, you are also pecuniarily assisting a most worthy and enterprising lady."

There was a slight movement of surprise among the audience; and Mrs. Bellairs, turning slightly in her chair beside the speaker, fixed upon him a piercing glance in which a shade of anxiety was traceable.

"I am sure you will be surprised and gratified," continued Mr. Butterworth blandly, "when I tell you—for I don't think you are aware of the fact—that the virtual owner of the business on Alabama Avenue—a most expensive place, I admit, but well worth the benefits you are deriving from it—is no other than the charming and talented lady who sits beside me."

Mrs. Bellairs sprang to her feet and fairly towered above the speaker in well-simulated indignation.

"It is false!" she cried in tones that rang through the hall.

Mr. Butterworth assumed a look of pained surprise.

"I thought you would like them to know it," he said. "I am sure they would contribute far more liberally to the cause if they knew that you were making a good thing out of it."

For several seconds it appeared to the startled audience that Mrs. Bellairs, with flashing eyes and crooked fingers, was about to fall on Mr. Butterworth and rend him limb from limb, but she restrained herself, assisted partly by the look of childlike innocence on that gentleman's countenance.

"Mr.—Mr. Butterworth is mistaken," she said in a choked voice as she resumed her seat. "I have absolutely no connection with Mme. Planchette's establishment, except to recommend my converts to patronize her as the only artist who can do justice to my ideals. I am sure Mr. Butterworth and this audience will accept my statement."

Mr. Butterworth bowed low, and contrition was written large on every feature.

"I deeply regret," he said, "if I have been led through false information to wound the feelings of a most admirable lady. The fact is that my friend and I"—he pointed to Mr. Scales—"were so much impressed with the possibilities of this new movement that this afternoon we called on Mme. Planchette and proposed to put a little capital into the business. We were informed by her that she was not alone in it—in fact, that Mrs. Bellairs was largely interested."

Judging by the tigerish expression on Mrs. Bellairs's face, it was just as well that Mme. Planchette was not present.

"Let us consider," continued Mr. Butterworth jovially, "that Mme. Planchette was mistaken, and let us welcome"—he pointed dramatically to the door—"another male supporter of the dress-reform movement."

As though moved by a common impulse, the heads of the entire audience revolved on their respective necks, and several scores of eyes were focused on a short, squat man with a prognathous jaw, and small blue eyes which gleamed from under penthouse brows, who stood at the top of the central aisle.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Butterworth with a hilarity verging on the hysterical, "I believe that we have another husband who is anxious to say a word for the movement."

The newcomer passed down the aisle with a brisk step and mounted the platform.

"Mrs. Bellairs," he said, "alias Briscoe, alias Vansittart, I arrest you on a charge of forgery."

He drew a formidable-looking blue document from his pocket and presented it, but to Mrs. Bellairs all colors were the same.

She had fainted.

"Get me a carriage, will you?" said the detective, turning to Mr. Butterworth as the scandalized audience stampeded for the exit. "You've done so much, you might do a little more."

"Give us a chance to get our women folk out of this," replied Mr. Butterworth cheerfully, "and we'll do what we can for you."

Half an hour later Mr. Scales, Mr. Butterworth, and their respective wives sat in the former's study.

"I think it was very mean," said Mrs. Scales. "There was no need to make us all look ridiculous."

"My dear lady," replied Mr. Butterworth, "it was the best way to open your eyes to the way you were being fooled. I venture to say that there are many husbands who will rise up and call us blessed.

"The woman is a notorious adventuress and deserves all that is coming to her. A public *exposé* was the most efficacious antidote for the nonsense she has been making money out of. What do you say, Scales?"

"I say," replied Mr. Scales as the ladies gathered their wraps about them and sailed majestically from the room, "I say that for once in our lives we have scored."

The Time-Killer.

BY CASPER CARSON.

How a Young Man's Wife Grew Weary Watching Her Husband Endlessly Tramping on the "Greenback" Carpeted Treadmill of Riches.

FROM a factory bench to a Fifth Avenue mansion is no uncommon turn of fortune's wheel.

But from a Fifth Avenue mansion to a factory-bench is a less usual jump; and that was the route taken by Holbrook Quinn.

Quinn's career had been the customary one of a young man born to wealth and luxury.

His father had made a fortune in copper, and Holbrook, the only child, was given from infancy up all the disadvantages of governesses, tutors, private masters, travel, and expensive amusements.

At eighteen, while he was dawdling his way through college, just managing to hold up with his classes, he was left an orphan, and the entire income of the vast estate came into his hands.

The principal was very wisely safeguarded by being entrusted to the management of the Navahoe Trust Company until the heir should have arrived at the age of twenty-five, and even then it was not to come into his hands unless, in the opinion of Benton Hardaway, his father's friend, and president of the trust company, he should have acquired sufficient business discretion properly to look after it.

This provision of the will, however, troubled Holbrook but little.

So long as he had plenty of money to spend on his various whims and caprices, he was quite content to let old Hardaway handle his property.

"He knows all about that sort of thing, and likes it," Holbrook used to say, with a yawn. "What's the use of my bothering to learn?"

Indeed, that was young Mr. Quinn's attitude toward life in general.

What was the use of bothering about his studies? He never expected to make any use of them.

What was the use of bothering to prepare himself for a profession or vocation? He would never have to earn his living.

What was the use of taking part in any of the college activities? Enthusiasms were not his long suit.

He did not even go in for athletics, except in a very tepid, gingerly sort of way. He was strong and active enough; but the training necessary to make or hold a position on any of the teams looked to him too much like work.

All he really cared to do was to slip along with as little effort as possible, exerting himself only enough to avert the boredom of idleness, or, as he was accustomed to put it, to "kill time."

Thus he became known among his mates as the "time-killer." Nothing interested him long, or held more than a passing charm for his surfeited fancy. He was *blasé* at twenty-two.

One thing may be laid to his credit: he didn't, like many young men in his position, take up with a lot of bad and vicious habits. Some people said it was because he didn't have energy enough to take up with anything; but it was really because he was at bottom a pretty clean-minded, decent sort of chap, and the so-called "gay life" only served to disgust him.

No; the worst, and at the same time the best, that could be said about Quinn was that he was a drone, a mere cumberer of the earth, a waster of wealth, a man without purpose or occupation.

Then, to his surprise, he awoke one day to find himself possessed at last of a definite and serious aim. He was madly in love with May Rockwood, and determined to marry her.

There was never a clearer case of the attraction of opposites; for May Rockwood was a girl of high ideals and manifold activities, ardent, vivacious, animated, in for society, suffrage, and settlement work—as different a type from Holbrook Quinn as could well be imagined.

Nevertheless, she accepted him. When one or two very close friends ventured to ask her why, she answered with light evasion, and kept her own counsel.

They knew it was not for his money, and they could conceive of no other reason which would cause any human being to yearn for companionship with such an unstable specimen; so the question remained an enigma.

Truth to tell, though, there were two reasons for May's choice. In the first place, she honestly returned Holbrook's affection. Secondly, he roused her ambition.

She believed that under his froth and foolishness were capabilities of no mean order, and she wanted to be the influence to inspire and bring to light these underlying powers.

In other words, she had decided to mold the "time-killer" over into a man.

II.

ACCORDINGLY, they were married; and for six months life ran along for them both on rubber tires.

They were devoted to each other, and in their long honeymoon trip abroad, as well as during the first weeks after their return, when they were settling down to housekeeping in the handsome home Holbrook had taken for his bride, they found plenty of amusement and diversion.

But when their domestic affairs slid into a routine, and Quinn began to lapse into his old inconsequent ways, May resolved that it was time for her to show her hand.

That eternal, good-humored question of his at the breakfast table: "Well, my dear, what shall we do to put in the time to-day?" was commencing to get on her nerves.

She spent two or three days meditating the best course to pursue; then came down one morning with her mind made up.

It was an ideal April day, with a soft, warm breeze rustling the curtains at the open window, and setting a bowl of yellow jonquils on the table gently nodding. From the tastefully appointed breakfast-room, one could look across the way to where the trees of Central Park were all a mist of green with the first bursting of their leaves.

Holbrook glanced up at his wife's entrance, and smiled at her. She was well worth a smile; for she made a charmingly girlish picture in her light, spring, morning costume, and with her fluffy, golden hair, and rounded, blooming face.

Then, as he attacked his grapefruit, he chatted lightly over something he had read in the paper, failing to notice that she seemed unusually silent and preoccupied.

At last, though, when he had finished the meal, and pushed back his chair from the table, he put the question for which she had been waiting.

"Well, my dear, what shall we do to-day?"

She looked up swiftly.

"What were you planning to do, Holbrook?"

"I? Why, I hardly know. There are a good many ways we might kill time. The yacht is in commission now, you know, and we might go out on a little cruise. Or, if you think better, we'll take the car, and run out in the country somewhere. You've never been to my shooting-lodge, have you? What do you say to a trip out there?"

Her face, however, did not light up at the suggestion; so he proposed another one.

"I'll tell you," he said. "It's too pretty a day to spend in town, and we'll go somewhere. But we won't set any destination. We'll just start off, and let chance decide where we end up.

"Maybe we'll find some wild flowers to pick. Maybe we'll discover some old inn or road-house where we can get delicious apple pie and milk. We'll be like a couple of kids starting out in quest of adventure. There—isn't that a brilliant idea?"

Her brow ruffled.

"It would be delightful, Holbrook," she returned thoughtfully, "if it came just once in a while—as a sort of holiday or change to be planned for and anticipated. But where's the fun when you can do that kind of thing any old day? You don't feel like making the exertion, when you know that to-morrow, or the next day, or the day after that will answer just as well."

He laughed.

"Why, all our lives are going to be a

holiday, May. We have nothing more serious on our hands than just to kill time."

"Ah, that's exactly it," she retorted with some vigor. "I am beginning to find out, and I think you have already discovered, if you'd only confess it, that there's nothing on earth more tiresome than a perpetual holiday. Mere amusement very quickly palls, and the effort one makes to seek some new pastime could be put to so much better purpose. Why, even children weary of playing all the time."

She rose from her place, and passing quickly round the table, slipped an affectionate arm about his neck.

"I am not blaming you, dear," nestling close to him. "As a young man, you have had nobody except yourself, and nothing except your own pleasure to look out for; but now you've got the responsibility of a wife on your hands."

"You surely are not proposing that I go to work, May?" He eyed her wonderingly. "What for? I've got all the money I want."

"But don't you think a man ought to know something about his own affairs—ought at least to look after and superintend his investments? You leave everything to Mr. Hardaway."

"Exactly," he assented. "A nice mess there'd probably be, if I didn't. As for the boy—I see that you've already settled it is to be a boy—" he smiled—"why, let him follow any bent he chooses. If he wants to tackle business, I have no objection; but there's certainly no need of my tackling it, so long as Hardaway is on the job."

"But do you consider it wise to trust any one quite so far, Holbrook?" she questioned. "Men every bit as respected as Mr. Hardaway have—"

"Nonsense," he interrupted. "I'd back Hardaway's fidelity with my life."

"Still, even granting his absolute honesty, he might make some disastrous mistake. He has entire control of your affairs, and—"

"No," Quinn again broke in. "Hardaway doesn't make mistakes."

"Well, then," she persisted, "suppose he should die?"

"Oh, in that case," carelessly, "there'd be somebody else to take his place.

"What's got into you this morning, anyhow, little girl?" He tweaked her ear. "You act as though you had all the worries of the world on your shoulders. Come on; let's go somewhere, and enjoy ourselves."

But her face did not relax.

"Are you never going to attempt anything serious, Holbrook?" she sighed.

"Anything serious?" he repeated. "Why, yes; now that you remind me of it, I have something quite serious on for this very morning—a matter which I completely overlooked."

"Really?"

"Hope I may die, if it isn't so."

"Oh," eagerly. "Tell me what it is."

"Well, I have an engagement down-town with an aeroplane chap, and if the thing looks right to me, I may close a deal for a machine. Ought to be pretty good sport, I fancy, until one gets tired of it. Eh, what?"

May started to say something, but restrained herself, and also she gave him her usual wifely kiss.

As she watched him down the street, however, a look of resolution came into her eyes, and turning back into the house, she hurried to the telephone, and calling up Benton Hardaway's office, asked for an appointment.

III.

HARDAWAY named eleven o'clock as the most convenient time for him to grant Mrs. Quinn an interview; and accordingly, well in advance of the hour, she ordered out her car, and was whirled down-town to the big, marble building of the Navahoe Trust Company.

Promptly ushered into the president's private office, she had to wait a moment or two until he had finished looking over and signing some important papers; but finally he turned and greeted her with a somewhat quizzical smile.

"Well," he inquired, "what is it that brings you down here in such a hurry? You want some more money, I suppose?"

"No," she replied. "It is less money that I want this time, Mr. Hardaway."

"Less money?" He raised his grizzled brows in puzzled fashion. "Is it a joke? I don't believe I exactly understand."

"It's this way, Mr. Hardaway." She was speaking earnestly now. "Holbrook's income, as you know, is so large that, extravagant as we may be, we can't possibly spend it. Some men, I suppose, could do it with gambling and dissipation; but, thank Heaven, he is not that kind.

"Neither has he any scientific or artistic bent which would enable him to get rid of

it; he is not interested in exploring, or collecting pictures, or any of those fads by which rich men dispose of their surplus. In short, his money is a millstone round his neck which holds him back from any kind of achievement, and really makes him miserable.

"He is like a child with too many toys; it frets him to know what he shall play with next. What he needs is some regular and settled occupation."

"Humph! Why doesn't he go in for philanthropy?" suggested Hardaway. "Other millionaires disburse a good deal that way, and, apparently, find pleasure in it."

"No." She shook her head. "I have thought of that, but I don't believe it would serve. There is nothing particularly exciting in endowing colleges and libraries; and, although it may do for old men who have had their full share of stress and struggle, a young man like Holbrook requires a more active scope. He gives liberally to charities of course, but it is only as one might chuck a coin to a beggar; he has no strong bias in that direction.

"No," she repeated decisively, "what he needs is something that will stir his blood, and rouse his ambition."

The old financier regarded her a trifle cynically.

"Something that will stir Holbrook Quinn's blood, and rouse his ambitions," he observed. "That is a pretty large order, young lady. Frankly, I don't believe it exists.

"I always told old Phelim Quinn that he was bringing that boy up wrong, and the results bear out my judgment. He is a confirmed loafer and idler, a 'time-killer,' as they call him, and it's too late now to make him over."

"Not so," she protested ardently. "Holbrook has plenty of character and ability to make a man of himself, if only the necessary spur or stimulus were applied to urge him to action. It is this swollen, overgrown income of his, I tell you, which holds him back."

Old Hardaway had a very different opinion. Personally, he regarded Holbrook Quinn as about the most worthless, incompetent youth who ever squandered the hard-won dollars of an industrious dad. But he did not take the trouble to argue the point with her.

"Well, perhaps," he granted non-committally. "But what are we going to do about it? Of course it would be a solution, if you could persuade him to give all this burdensome money away, but the estate doesn't come into his hands, you know, until he is twenty-five, and that is still a year and a half away.

"In the meantime," with a slightly bantering smile, "I guess you'll just have to stagger along under the load as best you can."

"But I am so sure," she demurred, "that if Holbrook were only relieved of this benumbing certainty in regard to his resources—if he were actually up against it, and had to fight for a living as other men do—he would rise to the occasion, and come out splendidly.

"Is there no way," she leaned toward him "that this money can be diverted or held back, so as to give him the chance?"

Hardaway shook his head.

"No," he said. "The income from the estate is his to do with as he pleases. I am simply empowered to collect it and pay it over into his hands. There, my responsibility ceases."

"Suppose, though," she insisted. "Suppose there were no income forthcoming? You have his affairs wholly in your own control, and have the right to make such investments as you see fit. Suppose, then, that through some error of judgment such as any man might make, you had tied up the estate, so that for a time it failed to produce any revenue?"

He started, and eyed her rather sharply.

"What are you trying to get at?" he demanded. "Who told you that I had committed any such blunder?"

"No one told me that you had. I was merely suggesting that you should."

"That I should?"

"Yes; or rather, that you should represent yourself as having done so. Can't you manage things so that Holbrook's fortune may appear to have been lost, or at least so affected that his income is temporarily cut off? He is too ignorant in such matters to question anything you might tell him."

The old man considered a moment, studying her keenly the while.

"Your idea, then," he said slowly at last, "is for me to deceive your husband, and withhold from him funds to which he is justly entitled?"

"Yes," she retorted defiantly, "just that, because it is the only way to save him.

Thrown on his own exertions, and given a responsibility to meet, Holbrook will make splendidly good. I know it."

Hardaway shook his head skeptically.

"I don't believe," said he, "that anything on earth will drive Holbrook Quinn to work. He is both temperamentally and by habit a drone.

"However," he pondered, and one might almost have said a gleam of relief dawned in his eye, "you should know him better than I, and there's at least a chance you may be right. Anyway, I'm inclined to give the experiment a test."

He touched a button on his desk, and when a clerk appeared in answer to the summons, instructed him to bring a copy of the Quinn will.

"Yes," he commented, after he had carefully read the document through, "it is just as I thought. There are no restrictions on me of any kind. During my term of guardianship, the management and control of the estate is left entirely to my discretion. The thing you ask can undoubtedly be done. The only question"—he bent a searching glance upon her—"is, do you really wish it?"

She paled slightly now that the actual decision was up to her, but her determination did not waver.

"Yes," she said firmly, "I do."

"And for how long a time shall the arrangement stand?"

"For how long a time?" She hesitated. "I had not thought of that. Why, I suppose, until Holbrook proves his ability."

She caught the cynical smile which flickered over the old financier's lips, and spoke up with quick resentment.

"Oh, he'll do it!" she cried. "He will not fail. Yes," with a flash of her gray eyes, "we'll make the agreement just that way, if you please. No income until Holbrook makes good."

"Or, rather," he corrected, "until Holbrook reaches twenty-five. I have no right to retain any of his money after the expiration of my guardianship, you know."

"Very well," she assented. "Until he is twenty-five, then. For a year and a half from to-day we are to have no money except what Holbrook earns. I can rely on you to stand firm?"

"Ah!" He wagged his head. "Don't fret about my end of it. The weakening will come from your side, unless I am very much mistaken."

"Will it?" She smiled loftily. "We shall see. And now, Mr. Hardaway," rising to take her leave, "I'll not detain you any longer. Thank you so much for helping me out."

"Better keep your thanks," the old man advised grimly, "until you see how the deal pans out. And, by the way," he stayed her a moment, "where can I get hold of Holbrook this morning? I shall have to break the news to him, you know."

"If you telephone to this address," she fished a card from her bag, and handed it over, "I think you can get him immediately. He said he would be there until about one o'clock."

The old man glanced at the card, and grinned.

"Aeroplanes, eh?" he remarked. "Well, that is one expense he can afford to cut out. He'll be high enough up in the air, when he gets through hearing what I have to tell him."

IV.

Holbrook came charging excitedly into the house about three o'clock that afternoon.

"May!" he called as soon as he got inside the door. "May!"

Then, as she tripped down the stairs in answer to his summons, he plunged into a voluble recital of his misfortunes.

"To put it in a nutshell, we're flat broke," he finally ended up. "Hardaway says he has some faint hope of saving the bulk of the estate; but even so, it will take months to get things straightened out, and in the meantime not a penny will be coming our way."

He paused, and stared at her wonderingly as she stood listening composedly to the story.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you certainly take it coolly enough. I guess you don't realize yet just what we are up against?"

"Oh, yes, I do," she assured him. "We're in the same fix as many another young couple in this town—dependent on our own exertions for our support. And, after all, what great difference does it make? We have our strength, and our health, and we love each other. Think of the thousands who lack our blessings."

"Oh, it's all very well to talk that way," he broke out wildly, "but we can't live long on that sort of thing. What are we going to do, let me ask you?"

"Do?" she repeated. "Why, you are

going to work, and I am going to keep house for you. We're going to be happier than we've ever been before in our lives, Holbrook."

"Is that so?" He gave a mirthless laugh. "I told you, you didn't comprehend the situation. How are you going to keep house with no house to keep? Hardaway informed me that I will have to move from this place at once, as it must be sold, and he has a purchaser ready to take immediate possession.

"And as for me going to work," he continued bitterly, "you talk as though jobs hung on trees. Probably I can land a berth sooner or later; but it's going to take a little time to look round, and in the meanwhile what are we going to live on? I haven't the price of a dinner in my pocket."

"Ah," she pulled his wobegone countenance down to her, and kissed him between the eyes, "don't give up so easily, dear boy. Trust your little wife to find a way out of the difficulties sometimes. I have been thinking a bit since you first told me the news, and it doesn't strike me that matters are half so bad as you imagine.

"In the first place," she pointed out, "what if we do have to leave this house? We can take the simpler part of our furniture—the things which are not of sufficient value to be demanded by the creditors—and fit up very comfortably a four or five-room flat.

"Oh, don't turn up your nose. I saw one up in the Bronx the other day, when I was hunting for a seamstress, which was really charming, and the rent was only twenty-two dollars a month."

"The Bronx!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir; the Bronx. And let me tell you, it has a good deal more air and sunlight than you get on Fifth Avenue."

"But where are we going to raise the twenty-two dollars? I tell you, I haven't got a penny."

"Wait a minute. I was coming to that point."

She hurried across the room, and rummaging in her desk, came back with a checkbook in her hand.

"See," she exclaimed. "I am sure all the entries in here are correct, and if you figure it up, you will find that I have still a good-sized balance left out of the allowance you made me.

"In fact," flipping over the stubs, and calculating as she went, "I figure that after we have settled up all our tradesmen's bills and expenses here, we should have something like two thousand dollars to keep us going, until you have had a chance to look round, as you call it, and get where you are bringing something in."

"What's that?" he cried, grabbing the book out of her hands, and hurriedly totting up the amount for himself. "By Jove, you're a wonder, little woman! Two thousand dollars, eh? Oh, I guess we won't starve just yet awhile.

"And as for going to any twenty-two-dollar a month flat up in the Bronx with all that money," he demurred scornfully. "Not guilty. We've got to economize, of course; but we don't need to drop quite out of the world.

"What we'll do is to put up at some apartment hotel until we can decide just what is the best move to make. There's a lovely suite at the New Brenda for only one hundred dollars a week. I'll phone right over, and tell them to reserve it for us.

"Also, while you've got your book there, I guess you'd better draw me a check for two or three hundred, May. I've got my club dues to settle, and then I shall want a little in my pocket for tips, and cab-fare, and one thing and another."

"But," she ventured to protest, "isn't it a little unwise, dear, to go spending so fast before we know where some more is coming from?"

"Nonsense," he rejoined, his former gloom giving way to a buoyant elation. "Don't go to croaking. I feel that we must be careful just as much as you do; but I've always heard that the worst way to get along in the world was to appear poor. One must put up a front, you know.

"Yes," he reflected, "the right thing for us to do is to splurge a bit. We must go to the most expensive places in town to eat, and you must get yourself a lot of new hats and gowns. So, while you're about it, May," he added, "I guess you'd better draw that check for five hundred."

V.

QUINN honestly tried to cope with his changed condition; but he didn't know how to set about it.

In the first place, he spent nearly a week trying to decide what field he should enter. He had no marked talent in any direction, and hence no leaning or bias to guide him in his choice.

The only clear idea he had was that he must keep up a "front"—for what reason he didn't exactly know himself—and in pursuance of this fallacy, the two thousand dollars which was to be their nest-egg rapidly diminished.

Another man might have traded on his social standing or wealthy acquaintanceship, and made a fortune; but Holbrook was unskilled in the ways of the grafter.

His lavish expenditure, when everybody knew he was broke, only served to rouse suspicion that he was up to some such game, and caused those who might have assisted him to shy off, and regard him with wary circumspection.

Finally, though, after several days of futile meditation, May, seeing that he was far away as ever from reaching a decision, came to his rescue.

"Holbrook," she said, briskly entering the room, and interrupting the game of solitaire upon which he was engaged, "I've got a position for you."

"A position?" He frowned a trifle. "But, sweetheart, I haven't yet determined just what line I want to go into."

She might have retorted that it didn't look very much as if he ever would make up his mind; but May was tactful.

"I know that, my dear," she said instead, "and I don't want to hurry you on so important a matter; but this seems an opening which Providence has thrown directly in our way, and which we can't well afford to disregard.

"It doesn't commit you definitely to any career," she hastened on, for he was evidently starting to frame up objections; "and yet, while giving you time to look round, and satisfy yourself what is your most advantageous course, will provide you an occupation.

"Call it a stop-gap, if you like, dear," she pleaded, "a mere temporary makeshift; but don't turn the idea down until you have at least given it a fair trial.

"If it should happen to suit you, they tell me it would undoubtedly open up the way to a big future."

Holbrook deigned to show a bit more interest.

"What line is it?" he questioned, gathering up the cards and slipping them into their case.

"Finance. The same field in which your father achieved his greatest success."

"Yes, that is so," Quinn dubitated. "Still, I was never very good at figures myself. Mathematics was always my weak point at school."

"This will not require any very extensive calculations," she told him. "Listen now, and I'll explain to you what the duties are.

"I happened just now," she proceeded, "to run into my father's old friend, Major Leatherby, down on the Avenue, and when he asked me how I was getting along, very naturally told him of our cropper, and said that you were looking for employment.

"'Why doesn't he come with us?' the major at once suggested. 'We need the services of all the bright, energetic young men we can get.'

"Then he told me that he and several other capitalists had recently organized a new banking corporation, and that if you would solicit depositors for it, they would pay you a good commission on every new account you brought in."

"H-m!" Quinn commented with a shrug. "Sounds to me suspiciously like being a book-agent, or soap-pedler."

"Not at all," she disclaimed. "Why, Holbrook, Major Leatherby told me that a good man ought easily to make from two to five hundred dollars a week at it, and he says that with your big acquaintance, you could probably do even better."

"Five hundred a week!" He straightened up. "Say, that's not half bad, is it? And, as you remark, there's nothing in the job to prevent me hooking up with a better opportunity, if it comes along. Guess I'll drop down and talk it over with this Leatherby chap some day this week."

"But I've already accepted for you, Holbrook. He told me they were in a hurry to get their solicitors out, and I promised him you'd be on hand ready to go to work at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"The deuce you did!" with a touch of irritation. "Why, I had promised some fellows to go to a pigeon-shoot to-morrow. And nine o'clock! Really, May, you never expected me to get down-town at such an unholy hour as that, did you?"

"Nine o'clock is the business-man's hour, dear," she rejoined quietly. "I'm afraid you'll have to get used to it. As for the pigeon-shoot, of course if you regard that sort of thing as more important than—"

"No, no," he interrupted placatingly. "Don't go up in the air. It merely struck me that on five hundred dollars a week I could well afford to take one day off for a

little pleasure. If you think it wiser to forego the shoot, and buckle down to business to-morrow, though, why, I'm perfectly agreeable."

He was so good-natured about it, so boyishly irresponsible in his whole attitude toward the affair, that she didn't really have the heart to scold him.

"Yes," she merely advised; "so long as I have promised on your behalf, I certainly think you ought to see Major Leatherby to-morrow."

"All right," he assented cheerfully. "Just as you say. But in that case, let's have a grand old blow-out to-night—a sort of farewell to my days of idleness. Draw a check for a hundred or so, to provide the sinews of war, and I'll go down to the hotel office and get it cashed."

"Do you really think we ought to?" she hesitated. "I hate to be a spoil-sport; but that little bank account of ours is dwindling so frightfully fast, and it doesn't seem right to me to throw it away, as we've been doing."

"What?" he scoffed laughingly. "You turning into a tight-wad, May? I'd never have believed it of you.

"Why, girlie, it's surely no crime to blow in a hundred or so to-night, when we've got five hundred or maybe more coming in at the end of the week. Come now; be your own sensible self, and look at things in the right light."

So, not without certain misgivings, May allowed herself to be persuaded, and drew the check.

VI.

THEY had the "blow-out" that night with a party of friends at a highly expensive road-house some miles up in Westchester County; and when Holbrook, having seen their guests home, had finished paying the garage-man for his hired touring-car, and slipping, according to his invariable custom, a liberal tip to the doorman and elevator-boy at the New Brenda, there was not enough left from May's check to wad a shotgun.

Moreover, the session having been a prolonged one, with the return to the city delayed until well after midnight, nine o'clock saw him still peacefully sleeping.

Indeed, it was close upon noon when, roused and hurried into his clothes by May's urgent exhortations, he finally put in an appearance at Major Leatherby's office.

The place which was to have been given him had already been filled; but owing to his friendship for May, Major Leatherby took Holbrook on, though in a far less advantageous capacity than that which he had originally intended.

"Still," he counseled the young man, "with reasonable industry and perseverance, you have the chance to make a very lucrative thing out of it, and, moreover, we stand ready to advance you to more important posts just as soon as your showing warrants it. This is a new and growing concern, Mr. Quinn, and promotions bid fair to be rapid."

Holbrook was duly impressed, and started out with high enthusiasm to interview the list of moneyed men the major gave him.

He went at his task in earnest, too; but from some cause or another, the results were slow and disappointing.

Perhaps he lacked the business experience properly to talk to business men. Perhaps he was temperamentally unsuited to the work.

Perhaps it was his mistaken policy of keeping up a "front" which was to blame, causing those whom he visited to apprehend some get-rich-quick scheme behind his persuasive statements.

At any rate, when he reached home that night, footsore and weary, after the most arduous experience he had ever put in, May and he computing the day's showing, found that he had secured only one small account, the commission on which would net him exactly seven cents.

Holbrook, completely disgusted, would probably have thrown up the job then and there, but on his wife's importunities, he finally agreed to hold on until he had given the thing a more thorough trial.

Having promised her, too, he doggedly stuck to it. May could not help but pity him, as she saw him creep dutifully out of bed morning after morning at an hour which it would hitherto have seemed a sacrilege to him to devote to anything but repose. Then he would struggle into his clothes—no easy task, by the way, for one who had always commanded the services of a valet — and then, having gulped down a hasty breakfast, he would be off on his rounds, to return to her in the evening wilted and discouraged over a long succession of failures.

Yes, she could not deny that he held faithfully to his word, and stuck at it; but

she began to see that something more than mere routine perseverance was needed.

He had no spring, no enthusiasm to put into his efforts. Never having concentrated on anything in his life, his mind was busy with a thousand other things while he was going about his interviews, and consequently he utterly failed to interest or convince his hearers.

When the end of the week came, and instead of the five hundred dollars they had so blithely counted on the earnings totaled only one dollar and thirty-six cents, May herself advised him to quit.

Realizing also by this time that his habits and training had left him practically without initiative, she bestirred herself to land him a new position, and thought she had surely hit it, when, through some influence she was able to control, she secured him a place as a newspaper reporter.

Holbrook, too, took kindly to the idea at first, and was full of glowing prognostications of what he would accomplish, and of the money he would make; but it took a shrewd city editor only three days to size him up as a hopeless "dub," and give him his walking papers.

Thereafter life became a sort of moving-picture with him of obtaining new situations on his wife's recommendation, and of being promptly ejected from them on his own showing of inexperience or incapacity.

He was successively in real estate, in a broker's office, in the insurance business, and in advertising; and each, after due trial, found him wanting.

It was just the same in every case as it had been with his job of soliciting for the bank. He worked hard, and resolutely, but he simply could not make good.

At length the bitter truth was forced in upon May; her husband was incompetent for any kind of business.

Old Benton Hardaway was right in his diagnosis of the case. Holbrook had trifled and killed time too long. It was now too late to make anything out of him.

Perhaps this decision on May's part was hastened in some degree by the condition of her bank-account. Since that night of the blow-out she had sedulously put on the brakes, and had yielded but sparingly to her husband's constant appeals for a check; but even so, the money seemed fairly to melt away, and now they were upon the last remaining hundred, with a fresh hotel bill only two days away.

There seemed nothing to do but confess to old Hardaway that she had been mistaken, and get him to annul their agreement.

One day longer she waited, hoping against hope that Holbrook might hold on with the big tobacco company which was his latest connection; but when he returned that evening with the now familiar announcement of a discharge, she decided it would be folly to delay any longer.

Bright and early the next morning she rose, and putting her pride in her pocket, set forth for the Navahoe Trust Building.

VII.

BEFORE starting out on her mission, May confessed to her husband the innocent little conspiracy of which she had been guilty, and the one thing which reconciled her to her distasteful task was his unfeigned joy at discovering that their misfortunes were all an "April fool joke," as he expressed it.

Not a word of reproach or blame did he have for her.

"He is certainly the most charming, sweet-tempered fellow in the world," she murmured to herself with a pang of contrition. "Most men would raise the roof at finding themselves the victim of such a deception; but he merely laughs and smooths it all over with a kiss."

In this spirit she had interposed no objection when he suggested that she draw the last remnant of the two thousand dollars in order to permit a celebration of his return to fortune; but making out a check for her entire balance, had smilingly thrust it into his hands.

Arrived now at the Navahoe Trust Building, however, she became beset with certain vague and uneasy doubts as to the wisdom of her action. It was not alone that the president failed to grant her an immediate interview. She had forgotten to make an appointment in advance, and it was in no way surprising that so busy a man should keep her waiting a bit, though she could not remember that such a thing had ever happened before.

Neither was her feeling due especially to the insolent tone of the buttoned page who brought back the answer to her request for audience, which is generally a pretty good indication of a visitor's status with his superior.

No, it was not any concrete thing which depressed her, but a certain intuitive ap-

prehension which had fastened upon her the moment she entered the building, that somehow she was going to fail in her enterprise.

She strove in every way to rid herself of this uncomfortable obsession, told herself over and over again that the notion was too absurd for consideration; yet, for all she could do, it persisted, and indeed grew stronger with every passing moment.

At last, after a seemingly interminable time had passed, and she was almost on the verge of hysteria, the buttons curtly informed her with a jerk of his head toward the president's office that Hardaway was ready to receive her.

The old financier was looking distinctly worried as she entered the office—worried and ill at ease.

He did not trouble to greet her, but silently motioned to a chair, and at once took up the object of her visit.

"Well," he growled, "I suppose you've come to tell me that your experiment has failed. You've discovered what I knew all along, that your precious husband isn't worth his salt; and consequently you want me to cry quits on our agreement, and restore him to his property. That's about the size of it, eh?"

"Yes." She flushed shamefacedly. "Or at least, the part about wanting back our income is true. As to Holbrook, it is a question of what 'being worth one's salt' exactly means. I have certainly found that he is not fitted for the ordinary lines of business."

"Nor the extraordinary lines either, I guess," sneered the old man. "In fact, if you tell me one thing he is good for, except to blow in money he never had any share in making, I'll take back every hard word I ever said against him. He is simply the most unmitigated—"

May quickly raised her gloved hand in protest.

"If you please, Mr. Hardaway, we won't discuss my husband," she said stiffly. "I am satisfied with him, and that is all that really interests me. Let us get down to the business on which I came."

He bowed.

"Very well, then; business it is. But let me first recall, if I can, the arrangement we entered into when you were down here six weeks ago. You came to me with the request, didn't you, that Holbrook's estate should be represented as so embarrassed that no income would be forthcoming for a considerable time?"

"Yes," she acquiesced, "I did. But," impatiently, "I don't see any necessity to—"

"Any necessity to dig up that agreement? Perhaps there is none. But it may interest you to know that I didn't have to represent."

"You didn't have to represent?"

"No, the proposal you made to me was exactly in accordance with the real facts."

She recoiled before this amazing statement, her eyes widely incredulous.

"You don't mean—" she stammered.

"I mean that when you were in here six weeks ago I was just on the point of sending for Holbrook Quinn to acquaint him with the news that his fortune was seriously involved. By a strange coincidence, you arrived at the very moment I had started to write him."

"But why did you not tell me?" she broke in breathlessly. "Why did you let me go away in the belief that it was a mere friendly *ruse* to spur him into action?"

"What good would telling you have done? The effect was the same so far as he was concerned, wasn't it? Besides, I had some hope then of saving something out of the wreck for him."

"Saving something out of the wreck for him?" she repeated. "You surely don't mean that his estate is—"

"Yes," he nodded, "it's a clean sweep; everything gone to pot. As I tell you, I hoped six weeks ago to pull out with only a heavy loss; but the market has gone wrong ever since, and your husband stands to-day a pauper."

"I don't believe it!" she cried fiercely. "Surely a vast estate like that could not be swept away in so short a time, unless there were fraud or trickery at the bottom of it."

"Nevertheless it is true," retorted Hardaway, frowning at her aspersion. "I am under no obligations to inform you just how it happened, and you probably wouldn't understand if I should try. Send your husband down here, though, or better still, an attorney representing your husband, and I will give a full and satisfactory explanation.

"A fuller and more satisfactory explanation, perhaps," he added with a mocking smile, "as a result of your wifely strata-

gem. At least, it has served to keep me from being bothered by lawyers during these six critical weeks."

"Don't exult too soon!" she blazed out at him. "From this time on, you are going to be bothered not only by lawyers, but by me. I've acted as your dupe, have I? Very well; but henceforth you'll find me in a different rôle. I'll be a bloodhound relentlessly on your trail."

VIII.

How May got home from that interview she never knew.

Her first conscious perception was of entering the door of their suite at the hotel, and seeing Holbrook turn away, laughing, from the telephone.

The laugh died upon his lips, however, as he caught a glimpse of her white, haggard face; and he rushed forward to catch her in his arms, and inquire distractedly what was the matter.

She struggled free from his clasp, though, and standing back, demanded hoarsely whether he had yet spent the check she gave him.

"Why, no," he answered. "I haven't been out of the room since you left."

"Oh, thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!" she cried, and with the relief his words brought her came the palliative of tears.

She threw herself on the couch and gave way to a perfect storm of weeping, while Quinn, anxious and bewildered, stood by vainly trying to find out the cause of such an outburst. At last, though, the tempest having spent itself, she raised her head.

"Holbrook," she said tragically, "that hundred-dollar check is the last money we have in the world!"

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Is old Hardaway trying to stand out for that fool agreement? By Jove, if he is, I'll mighty soon bring him to time."

"No," she said, "he claims that the agreement only represented what were the actual facts."

Then, in a voice broken by sobs and with a good deal of self-condemnation, she recounted all that the president of the Trust Company had told her.

Holbrook took the news with more equanimity than she had expected. She forgot that the first announcement had been real to him, and that this being a mere repetition could not in the nature of things create so profound a shock.

"Yes," he said quite calmly, when she had finished, "I haven't the slightest doubt that you are right, May, and that the old scoundrel has robbed me; but that isn't going to help us much at the present writing.

"In the first place, he has no doubt covered up his tracks so skilfully that it'll be a hard matter to trap him; and, secondly, even though we have the proof, it'll be a dickens of a long while before we get anything back. For the next ten years we might just as well regard that money as gone, and set our course accordingly."

She looked at him curiously.

"And is that all you care, Holbrook?" she asked. "Don't you really mind this loss any more than you show?"

"Mind? Of course I mind. I'm going to put the very best lawyers I can get on the case, and I promise you that no stone shall be left unturned in the effort to prove that old villain's rascality.

"But"—he turned toward her, his voice trembling slightly—"there's something else that's bothering me a whole lot more than the money part of it, and that is—what are you going to do?"

"What am I going to do?"

"Yes. Of course, the other time you knew, or thought you knew, that it was only a fake loss, and that everything would come out all right in time. But now it's the real thing, girl; I haven't got a sou marquee to my name, and, more than that, it's been pretty well demonstrated in the last few weeks, I guess, that I'm not A1 as a meal-ticket. There's going to be some pretty rough sledding ahead; and it's only fair to give you back your freedom. So, I say again, what are you going to do?"

She raised herself up from the couch, and caught his hand in hers.

"'For richer, for poorer,' Holbrook," she said softly. "'In sickness, in health, until death us do part.' It's not a question of what I am going to do, dear boy. It's what are we going to do?"

"Do you mean it, May?" he cried.

For answer, she flung herself into his arms, and for a space the two forgot that there was any such sordid thing as money in the world.

Presently, however, when they had returned in some degree to the practicalities of life, and May's agile mind had commenced to evolve various plans for the future, Holbrook suddenly interrupted her

by springing to his feet with an exclamation and hurriedly grabbing up the telephone directory.

"What is the matter?" she questioned as he flipped over the pages. "Have you got an appointment of some kind on hand?"

"No, but I am going to make one," he returned; and, having by this time found the number he was seeking, sent in a Brooklyn call.

"Is that you, Mr. Agnew?" she heard him say when the connection was effected. "Well, this is Quinn. Holbrook Quinn. Is that offer still open that you made me a little while ago? It is?

"Well, then, I want to tell you that I've reconsidered my decision, and will be glad to accept. What time shall I report for work? Seven - thirty to - morrow morning, you say? All right, sir. I'll be on hand."

"But what is it, Holbrook?" demanded May, all agog with curiosity. "You didn't tell me that you had any offer. And promising to be there at seven-thirty! Why, my dear boy, you'll never keep it."

"Oh, yes, I will," he said; and as he spoke May noticed something in him which she had never observed before—a new quality of self-reliance which seemed to raise his chin and straighten out his shoulders.

"It's this way, my dear." He sat down beside her to explain. "You remember that when you came into the room I had just hung up the telephone receiver, and was laughing fit to split my sides? Well, it was this man Agnew who had been talking to me, and what he said struck me then as a bully good joke.

"I had never heard of him before, don't know him from the side of sole-leather; but he, it seems, had somehow learned of me, and had found out that I was looking for work. Then, to make a long story short, he offered me a job in his shoe-factory over in South Brooklyn.

"He told me that he was aware I didn't have any experience; but said that he could put me on as helper on one of the lasting-machines, and would pay me eighteen dollars a week as a starter.

"Being a millionaire at the moment—in imagination, at least — I scorned his proposal; but since then my sentiments have experienced a decided change, and, as you just heard, I have accepted with thanks. Funny go all round, isn't it?"

"Funny!" May spoke with emphasis. "I think it is dreadful. The idea of you even considering a position as factory-hand!"

Holbrook's face suddenly became serious.

"Little girl," he said, "you've tried to shunt me along, and push me into the paths I should go; and it hasn't been much of a success, has it? I guess the trouble was that it isn't in my blood to hold any ladylike jobs, and that's the reason, too, why I haven't been a success as a gilded youth.

"My old daddy was the same way. They speak of him as a financier, but he was never that. He was just a coarse, common miner, who made his money with pick and shovel, and later by knowing how to boss a gang of men. That's the training I need, too, May—manual labor.

"Down in my heart I know it's the only field where I can make good, and I'm for it. Heretofore I've let other people run my career, but from this time on I take things into my own hands. I'm going to take this job, as you've heard me say; but the decision is in no way binding on you. That offer of freedom still stands, if you want to avail yourself of it."

But there was not even a gleam of hesitation in the steady eyes she upraised to his.

"'Whither thou goest, I will go,'" said she. "And, Holbrook, I think you are perfectly splendid. I never loved you as much as I do this minute."

IX.

With the one - hundred - dollar check which Holbrook had providentially failed to squander, and by the disposal of some of their jewels and expensive personal belongings, they managed to settle their bills at the palatial New Brenda and set up a modest home in a little cottage not far from the factory in South Brooklyn.

Hardly a thing in the whole establishment but what represented some sacrifice of former grandeur.

For instance, the dining-room furniture was bought with the proceeds from the sale of Holbrook's evening clothes, and May's marquise ring was now converted into a kitchen range and the sewing-machine upon which she industriously fashioned a lot of little garments.

Naturally, there was a lot of fun at first over these things, as well as in the excitement of getting settled down to housekeeping; but presently, when matters lapsed into a routine, it proved anything but an easy experience for either of them.

No girl, no matter how much she may love her husband, who has been reared all her life like a delicate exotic, can find it pleasant to be suddenly plunged into the tedious, never-ending grind of dishwashing and pot-scouring and cooking and sweeping and bed-making which even the tiniest house entails.

And no man who has been used to a valet and a French chef, and nothing but leisure, can call it enjoyment to roll out of bed in the gray dawn, work all day in a dusty, evil-smelling factory, and then return at night to a badly cooked meal.

Still, both had to a great extent the saving grace of humor, and where that failed love came to the rescue; so they surmounted the hardships and annoyances in good shape, and were on the whole an extremely happy couple.

Moreover, Holbrook was buoyed up by the realization that at last he had made good. His assertion that manual labor was his true field had been amply proven; for he had been steadily advanced from the start, and was now in charge of a machine.

He owed nobody a penny, was meeting all his expenses, and had even begun to lay by a little for the inevitable rainy day.

May was proud of him, and he was proud of her and of himself.

At this auspicious time a baby boy arrived in the household.

Holbrook felt as he held the red-faced, squirming mite in his arms that at last his cup was full and running over.

How he could ever have resigned himself to the aimless, purposeless life he had once led, he could not now understand. Why, it was the very breath of existence, he thought, to have these responsibilities on him, and to feel that he was laboring for the comfort and welfare of the wife and little one at home.

Not, it must be understood, that he had in any way relinquished his determination to recover his fortune, if that were in any way possible. For the sake of May and the boy, he was resolved to spare no effort in that regard; yet it must be confessed that he was well-nigh ready to give up and admit himself defeated.

Lawyer after lawyer had he sent to investigate the matter, and all came back with the same story. Nothing could be done, Hardaway had acted entirely within his rights, and there was no proof of fraud or chicanery in any of his dealings.

"He has bought that fellow up," May would insist vehemently each time. "Send another lawyer to investigate."

So another attorney would be sent, and, after a period of waiting, back would come the old familiar report.

As already said, Holbrook was almost ready to throw up his hands and quit. Indeed, had it not been for his wife's insistence he would probably have done so long before; for he, manlike, was looking rather to the future than the past.

It is always the women who keep fresh flowers upon tombstones.

So time slipped on, and presently it was summer again. In the fierce heat of July the baby was taken ill, and, although it soon recovered, the young mother, overworn by anxiety and constant watching at the crib-side, fell sick in turn, and showed anything but such speedy recuperation.

The young doctor who was called in looked graver and graver as the days passed on, and May still lay white and languid, seemingly unable to manifest the slightest interest in getting well.

Even more grave did he look when the tonic days of fall, to which he had confidently looked for a remedial effect, arrived, and there was still no change.

But one evening as Quinn, returning from the factory, met him just coming out of the house, the physician stepped as though a load had been removed from his shoulders.

"She must be better, doctor," queried Holbrook eagerly, "the way you look?"

"No," the other shook his head. "No, there is no change. In fact, I have decided that the case requires consultation with a specialist, and, if you have no objection, would like to call in Dr. Nagelschmidt."

"Dr. Nagelschmidt!" gasped Holbrook.

He had heard in former days of the almost princely fees received by this famous Fifth Avenue practitioner.

"I want to do everything I can for my wife, but I—I am afraid I can hardly stand such an expense as that."

"Oh," the doctor laughed, "don't bother your head on that score for a minute. Dr. Nagelschmidt is an old friend of mine, and will come entirely without expense to you."

Sure enough, he did. To the humble little home of the Brooklyn mechanic came not once, but many times, the great physician, and spent time there for which many a millionaire would have paid him at the rate of hundreds of dollars an hour.

With his coming, moreover, May began steadily to improve. She regained her strength, and was able to get out of bed, and even attend to some of her household tasks; but, even so, Nagelschmidt was far from satisfied.

"We will never effect a permanent cure as long as your wife stays in this environment," he announced in his curt, authoritative way. "What she needs is a long sea-voyage and a winter in the south of France."

A long sea-voyage and a winter in the south of France! And Holbrook, deeply in debt as a result of the long-continued illness, was now making an average of about twenty-eight dollars a week.

He had never believed that he could entertain toward any one such a murderous feeling as surged over him at that instant for old Benton Hardaway.

Had that gray-headed old swindler been within reach of his fingers just then, he told himself, he would have throttled him with pleasure.

X.

With that fierce fury raging in his heart, Holbrook went back to the factory eager to plunge into work, and thus for a time forget his troubles; but, to add to his bitterness, he found himself condemned to a period of idleness because there was no stock ready for his machine.

In a shoe-factory, it must be understood, the work passes from hand to hand, each man, from the cutters to the finishers, being engaged on only a single operation; so that if there is any delay or hitch anywhere along the line it is bound to be conveyed over the entire route.

In this case, as frequently before, it was the cutters who were at fault; and, since Holbrook was assigned to the lasting-machine, he had, of course, to await their good pleasure.

However, if it had not been the cutters he well knew it would have been the people in the stock-room, or the pattern-men, or somebody else.

These delays seemed bound to occur for a longer or shorter time each day, and most of the men seemed to accept them as a pleasant respite to the continuous toil.

Not so Holbrook, though. Working feverishly, as he was, to grind out every possible cent for May and the baby, he fiercely resented each moment of inaction, and regarded it as much a theft from him as though money had been taken from his pocket.

Being on piece-work, he could easily figure out how he might double his wages if only he were not subjected to these annoying interruptions.

"Darned time-killers!" he would anathematize his fellow workmen, forgetting in his anger how often the selfsame epithet had been applied to himself. "If I had the running of this factory, I'll bet I'd soon put a stop to a lot of the monkey business that is going on."

More than ever he felt like railing to-day with the thought in his mind of that needed sea-trip for May, from which he was cut off by reason of his poverty.

Yet he knew there was nothing he could do to hurry things along. He was but a cog in the big machine, unable to turn a hand or make a move until the impulse was communicated to him in regular routine from the department next below.

All he could do in the interim was to twiddle his thumbs and relieve his feelings by swearing.

But as he sat there idly behind his idle machine, his attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of two men entering the shop. One was Agnew, the proprietor, and the other—yes, he could not be mistaken—was Benton Hardaway.

Slowly they strolled along from machine to machine, talking as they went, and finally paused close enough to where Holbrook crouched unseen behind his machine for him to overhear every word they spoke.

"Well," said Hardaway, "now that I've been over your plant, it looks to me more than ever as though you would have to accept our terms. I don't want to fight you, Agnew. We have been good friends for a long time; but the syndicate I represent wants this shop, and, by heck, they're either going to have it or crush you. We are offering you a reasonable price, as you know, and I tell you frankly that you're a fool if you don't accept it."

Then they passed on, but Holbrook had heard enough to give him full comprehension into what was afoot.

For some time there had been vague rumors that a wealthy syndicate was being formed to take over all the shoe-factories of the metropolitan district, and now from Hardaway's statement this had evidently come to pass.

More than that, the grasping syndicate

was plainly trying to force Agnew to sell his plant to them whether he was willing or not.

Oh, thought Holbrook, if there was only some way that he could foil the machinations of the plotting crew and cheat them of the prize they deemed so safely in their power! Would not that be a just requital to Benton Hardaway for all the misery he had brought to him?

But it was, of course, idle to even dream of such an accomplishment.

What could he do, a poor, hard-working mechanic, to check the designs of Benton Hardaway?

And then, as he dwelt upon the folly of such a project, he suddenly saw his way clear.

XI.

QUINN took a lay-off from work that afternoon, and spent the time at home.

Usually on such rare occasions he devoted himself entirely to May and the baby; but to-day he did not have a word for either of them.

Instead, he put in hour after hour over the dining-room table, figuring with pencil and paper upon some apparently abstruse calculations; and he did not even interrupt his task for the evening meal, but still kept figuring away with one hand, while he ate with the other.

At last, though, seeming to be satisfied, he transcribed his results neatly in ink and betook himself to bed. To May's sleepy inquiries as to what he had been doing he replied, as he had replied to her all the afternoon, that he would tell her more when he knew more himself.

When on rising next morning, however, he donned his Sunday suit instead of his usual workaday clothes, her curiosity was no longer to be denied, and he had to tell her that he was going over to Manhattan to see Benton Hardaway.

"Oh, Holbrook!" she exclaimed excitedly, "you don't mean to tell me there's a chance of getting back our money?"

It hurt him to kill the hope thus awakened; but he had to do it, and he added it up as another tally in the score against Hardaway.

"No," he said, "not a chance in the world of that, little girl; but there is a chance to get half-way even with him. I am going to put him on the gridiron, and enjoy myself by seeing him squirm."

To his surprise, he found on his arrival at the Navahoe Trust no delay in admitting him to the presence of the great man. He had rather anticipated something of the kind, and was prepared to meet it; but no sooner was his name announced than orders were given to show him in at once.

"Ah, Holbrook!" the old fellow smiled a friendly greeting to him. "It's been quite a while since we met."

In that room, and with that smile upon him, Quinn somehow felt his bitter, revengeful feelings starting to evaporate.

He could not but recall the many times that he had come to that same office to make requests, and always had been treated with the utmost kindness and courtesy.

Even the memory of the great wrong done him could not utterly outweigh all the other memories which thronged in upon him.

He started to speak, checked himself, then started again, and once more halted.

"Mr. Hardaway," he said at last, his voice husky, his chin sunk on his breast, "I came here to-day to do a dirty trick. Out of pure revenge, I was going to mix in an affair which doesn't concern me in the least. In short, I am going to spoil the deal between you and Agnew for the sale of the shoe-factory."

"H-m!" observed Hardaway dryly. "I fancy that would have been a little hard to do."

"Not a bit of it," averred Holbrook with a touch of pride. "I have worked out a system here" — exhibiting his sheets of paper—"by which delays can be avoided in passing from department to department, and thus according to my figures increase the efficiency of the plant by twenty per cent, and at the same time make a ten per cent reduction on running expenses.

"With that applied to our factory, Agnew could afford to defy your syndicate, for you could not possibly compete with him. It was my idea to give my figures to him. and let him stand out against you; but now I have changed my mind. I will tear them up."

"No, don't do that," hastily interposed Hardaway; "possibly we can use them."

"I will help neither side, nor hinder either. Fight it out among yourselves."

"But, my boy, there is no fight about it. Agnew sold out to us yesterday afternoon; and, that being so, you certainly won't refuse to help yourself."

"To help myself?"

"Yes; for you are one of the largest holders in this syndicate. You are twenty-five years old to-day, Holbrook, so I will tell you something I have kept secret a good while.

"Your money is intact, and has always been so. I simply carried your wife's proposal a little farther than she was willing to go. And I must say that my experiment seems to have worked better than hers."

After the first staggering effects of this announcement had passed off, a sudden suspicion struck Quinn.

"Then it was you," he demanded, "who got Agnew to employ me? And you also who employed Dr. Nagelschmidt, and who did a lot of other things?"

"Well," the old man confessed, with a twinkle of the eye, "I was your guardian, wasn't I, and bound to look out for you?

"But come," he halted Quinn's expressions of thanks, "let's go over and look at your new factory, and also make a call on your wife. Remember, I have still to make my peace with her."

"All right," assented Holbrook; "but I will have to stop on my way and book a couple of passages to Havre. I shall spend this winter in the south of France."

"Going back to time-killing?" suggested Hardaway.

"Not by a jugful. I shall devote every moment I can to working out and improving this efficiency scheme of mine. A time-killer I shall be, perhaps, but not in the old way. Stick a pin in that!"

The Silent Man at Tallow Dip.

BY GEORGE B. WALKER.

Some People Never Learn To Boss Themselves Until They Find That They Can Boss Others.

"HOW far is it to the Tallow-Dip Mine, partner?"

Packy Ehrlin grinned amiably up at the young man who had questioned him.

"'Bout two mile straight up the cañon," he answered. "If you foller the wagon-road, you can't miss it. Hold on a minute, though. The stage will git in here about ten minutes from now, and you can ride up with Billy Smathers."

"Thanks, I guess I'll wait," the other answered, sitting down on the stoop of Packy's half-way house.

Packy summed up the newcomer.

"H-m! He's a well-built guy, O. K. Kind o' youngish, but plenty of sand, and he'll sure be needin' it when he hits Red Harry up to Tallow Dip."

The object of his thoughts remained silent, so Packy took the liberty of starting the conversation:

"Goin' to work at Taller Dip?"

"I am, if they need men."

"Wal, take it from me, young feller, an' steer clear of Red Harry." Then, as if it were an afterthought on his part: "Whar do you hail from?"

A quick, searching look flashed from the man's eyes. Finding Packy disinterestedly carving the plug of chewing tobacco which he held in his hand, he answered shortly:

"Keeno."

Now, Packy was well acquainted in Keeno, which was a railroad junction, and knew all the inhabitants of the place personally; but in the young man's eyes he had seen that which forbade further questioning. It was not fear, but respect for the man which made him subside into a painstaking whittler.

Finally the stage drew up in front of them.

"Thar's yer ride, partner." And Packy waved his hand toward the standing team. "An' say, don't yer knuckle under to Red Harry, 'cause yer too good a man to do that."

"I won't," the other answered, as Smathers gathered the tired broncos together. "So-long."

The stage-driver also tried to draw him out, but was as decidedly cut short as Packy had been before him.

Arriving at the mine, the man paid his stage fare, and then went directly to the superintendent's office.

"Well, what can I do for you?" the man in charge asked.

"I want a job."

"What can you do?"

"Most anything in your line."

"Do you understand timbering?"

"I do."

"Well, start in to-morrow as shift-boss. But hold on a minute. What's your name?"

The applicant for the position hesitated for a moment; then, looking squarely at Cropsey, spoke slowly:

"Smith's as good as any, I guess. John Smith."

"All right, Smith; you go to number eight bunk-house and tell McClusky that I sent you. First, though, you had better go and feed over to the cook-house. Tell Denny that you came from me, and he'll fix you up."

II.

SMITH had been working for about a week before he met Miss Bess.

One morning he was overlooking the erection of a pump platform, when she and the old man came down the main gangway.

A huge sixteen-by-sixteen girder was creeping upward, and Smith was dubiously watching the tackle where it was lashed to a piece of steel wedged into the roof. It was quivering and jarring, and already he had sent his men out from beneath it, trusting his nimbleness and good eye to get him safely away should the fastenings break.

"Oh, dad!" Bess cried, as she caught sight of the work. "Come on and let's watch this. It must be some of that new timber-boss's work."

Smith, turning quickly in their direction, saw the girl's purpose, and spoke sharply:

"Get back. Don't come in here!"

She hesitated for an instant; and then, with an impatient toss of her head, walked in to Smith's side, directly underneath the swinging beam.

Watching the beam intently, he spoke again:

"Get out of here, you little fool! That thing is liable to fall at any moment."

"Oh, I guess I can stand it if you can," she flung back at him. "Besides, I am Mr. Finey's daughter, and am more used to giving orders than taking them."

"Well, Miss Finey," he returned, "you'll take that one from me, or I'll carry you out. Now, which will it be?"

"Which will it be?" she mocked wrathfully. "Why, if you—"

At this moment Smith, whose eyes had kept steadily on the block-fastenings in the roof of the tunnel, saw the rock where the steel was wedged in commence to chip. With a warning shout of "Duck, boys!" to the men, he turned, and with a mighty shove pushed Miss Bess away from him. There was a rending and tearing, and in another instant the beam crashed at his feet on the spot where she had stood a moment before.

Calmly rubbing the dust from his eyes, he proceeded to make the fastenings on the beam secure, totally ignoring the looks of his men as they watched the mine-owner raise up his daughter from where the force of Smith's shove had thrown her. He was in the act of making a slip-knot when a hand came down on his shoulder.

He swung round to find old man Finey standing in front of him with outstretched hand.

"Thanks, Smith," he said briefly, at the same time giving his hand a mighty squeeze. "I won't forget this, and some time I may be able to do something for you. Come up to the house some evening, won't you?"

"I will, Mr. Finey," he answered, and turned immediately to his work.

Brief and concise as the two men would have had this incident appear, it did not pass without recognition.

As is always the case in a community of that kind, the news went through the camp quickly; and that evening McClusky walked over and sat on the edge of Smith's bunk. After several ineffectual attempts, he finally spoke:

"Smith," he said, "the boys all want to shake hands with you for what you done this afternoon. You ain't got no objections, have you?"

Smith had objections, but he submitted to the ordeal, for he realized that it was whole-souled appreciation from strong men, shaking hands with the entire crowd, from big, hearty McClusky to the kid, and realizing that from that on he would be solid with the men.

The next night, when he had changed his

mine-clothes for the ones he wore outside, the kid brought him a note from the old man, requesting the honor of his presence at dinner. On the bottom of the note there was a postscript from Miss Bess to the effect that, though he had been the one to give orders the day before, she meant to give them hereafter, and commanded that he appear and take dinner with them that evening. The word "commanded" was underscored.

Needless to say, he went, and in the course of the meal the old man partially succeeded in drawing him out.

"Yes, I sometimes do wish I was back in Chicago," he replied, in answer to a question the other had asked him. "It certainly would be nice to hunt up the old crowd at the club and—"

He broke off suddenly as he realized that, here, to these strangers, he was saying too much.

"And the fellow that told me about it said it was a fine place," he finished lamely, closing up like a clam.

Finey, rare old diplomat that he was, tactfully turned the conversation into different channels, and the incident passed apparently unnoticed.

During the following month Miss Bess and Smith became fast friends. Moonlight walks, horseback-rides, and excursions to various points of interest in the vicinity became the order of events. All of these things were extremely pleasant to a man who is practically starving for companionship, but it did not in the least fit in with the well-laid plans of others.

Tom McKee, engineer and assayer for the Tallow Dip, by virtue of his relationship to the old man, which was that of second or third cousin, previous to Smith's appearance had hoped that his suit with Bess was prospering, and it was with a growing feeling of impatience and jealousy that he watched the friendship between the two gather headway.

Moving to the door of the assay-shop one afternoon to catch a breath of fresh air, he saw the kid coming toward him with the weekly mail.

"Hallo, Tom!" the kid shouted. "You're gettin' more an' more popular every time the mail comes in." Handing him a bunch of letters: "Say, Tom, you don't know any one here in camp by the name of Tarkin, do you? There's a couple of letters come for a feller of that name, an' we've sent 'em back, twict; but here they is again, an' on both of them it says, 'Must be correct address.'

"Tom," the kid broke out, his eyes widening at the thought, "maybe it's Smith. He ain't had no mail since he's been here. Gee! There was always somethin' kind o' funny about the way he closes up when you ask him where he comes from. What about it? Do you think they're his'n?"

McKee's heart gave a great bound at the kid's words, but, controlling himself, he turned to him reproachfully.

"Well, you little runt," he spoke severely, "I'm surprised at you. Why, you're as bad as a gossipy old maid, and after Smith saved Miss Bess for us, too. You can leave the letters here, and I'll ask him about them; but I don't think they're his."

"Well, that sure suits me," the kid acquiesced. "Them letters must've put that pipe-dream inter my head, an' I'm glad to get 'em off my hands."

Notwithstanding his reproachful speech to the kid, McKee could not put the disquieting thought from him, and he was ill prepared to control himself when Smith knocked on the door to give him some ore samples.

"Come in," he growled, in answer to the knock.

Smith turned the knob and stepped inside.

"Hallo, Tom!" he greeted him. "Here's some samples Mr. Finey asked me to give you. They're from that new cross-cut on the fourth level. How goes it?"

"It don't go at all," the other replied shortly.

Smith's eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Why, what's up, Tom, old man?" he asked kindly.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, it's all up. Here"—handing him the letters—"are these yours?"

Smith glanced at the writing on the envelopes calmly.

"It seems to me that it's none of your business," he replied quietly.

"None of my business!" the other cried, finding an outlet for his thoughts of the afternoon. "None of my business! Tell me, Smith, do you mean anything serious by the attention you're paying Miss Bess?"

"That's none of your business, either; but I'll answer it. No, I don't. I do, however, consider Miss Bess one of the best friends I've got."

"Then—you aren't—it isn't—" McKee stuttered, with a great light in his eyes.

"No," Smith answered. "I have—I had a sweetheart once."

A soft expression flitted for an instant across his generally impassive face.

III.

Two months later, when Smith and McKee had become fast friends, and were sitting in the assay office chinning, the kid came down the road on the dead run.

"Mr. Smith!" he called as he came in the door.

"Yep," Smith answered him.

"The old man sent me down here to tell you to come up right away." Turning to McKee, he added: "An' Miss Bess says you're to come, too."

The two men lost no time in obeying instructions, hesitating only long enough to snatch their hats.

"I wonder what's up, John?" Tom asked as they ran up the road.

"You've got me, Tom. Maybe the collar on number six shaft has slipped in. I spoke to him about that yesterday. It's a cinch he wants us in a hurry, because I never saw that kid run before in my life."

Both men reached the yard breathless after their up-hill run, and in an instant were in the house.

They found the old man and Miss Bess seated opposite each other in front of the open fireplace.

"Come in, boys, and pull up your chairs," the mine-owner greeted them, and when they were seated he turned abruptly to Smith.

"The sheriff of Palmo County is looking for one William Tarkin. He has sent out a description which fits you to a 'T,' Smith. Now, my boy, you've always been on the square with me, and I'm going to help you make your getaway. I don't know what you've done, and, what's more, I don't care.

"I've had Black Meg, my saddle animal, saddled along with two pack-mules, and I'm goin' to give 'em to you. If you hit the trail right away, you can cross the 'CLM Bar' divide to-night, and when the sheriff gets here I'll see that he don't take the right trail after you. If they do get you—and they will some day—always remember that I owe you a debt of gratitude, and call on me for help. I'll stay with you to the limit."

Tarkin, alias Smith, had gripped the arms of his chair, when Finey started to talk until the knuckles of his hands cracked, but now he sat way down in his chair with his arms hanging listlessly at his sides.

"Did you say the 'CLM Bar' divide?" he asked, shaking himself together.

"Yes."

"Well," resignedly, "where it is? I don't—"

"Why, dad," Miss Bess interrupted, "how in the world is Mr. Tarkin going to find his way across there? It's the most treacherous trail in the mountains, and only a man who knows it can make the trip with safety."

"And I'm one of the men that knows it," McKee said, getting up out of his chair. "No—no, Bess," checking the protest about to pour from the girl's lips, "the sheriff won't miss me when he comes up here.

"You know yourself that I'm away a good part of the time prospecting, and he'll think that's where I am this time. Besides, Tarkin is my friend, and I'm going to help him out. I'll only be gone a couple of days," he added to reassure her. "Probably I'll be back before that."

"Well," Finey broke in, "you'd both better be hittin' the grit, because the sheriff might get onto your trail, no matter what I said to him. Always remember that I'm your friend, Tarkin. Good-by!"

The two men made their adieus and, running to the corral out back of the house, they were soon in the saddle and off up the trail into the forest.

McKee made two or three efforts at conversation; but, as Tarkin answered in monosyllables, gave it up as a bad job, and they traveled in silence.

Supper, consisting of flapjacks, bacon, and coffee, was prepared and eaten before either of the two men spoke. Again it was McKee who broke the silence.

"We'll be over the hill by ten o'clock to-morrow, John," Tom offered cheerfully.

"No, we won't," Tarkin spoke determinedly. "I've been thinking it over and made up my mind, Tom, and there's only one more divide that I'm likely to cross."

McKee looked up with a start of surprise.

"Why, John," he argued, "you've made a clean getaway, and—"

Tarkin cut him short.

"Tom," he spoke decisively, "you listen to me. All afternoon I've gone over this thing in my mind, and now I see only one way out of it."

He paused long enough to fish a coal from the fire and light his pipe with it; then resumed:

"Three and a half years ago I was living in Chicago, where I had just graduated from the School of Mines. A few days after the graduation exercises a bunch of the fellows were celebrating the event with me. Somehow or other a rough-house was started. I might say right here that all I remember was the rough-house.

"Well, to make a long story short, there was a man killed, and circumstances and all that pointed toward me. Never having faced anything of that nature before, I went to my father and begged him on my knees to help me out. He is an iron man, and refused to have anything to do with the case. In desperation, I went to my *fiancée* and told her the whole story, and she, Heaven bless her, gave me the money to come West with, assuring me that she would go to the bottom of the thing."

Tarkin paused to relight his pipe, and then continued:

"Well, it was simply another case of out of sight, out of mind, I guess, for, after getting a couple of letters from her, they suddenly stopped. Since then I've knocked round the country considerably, always doing mining and always having to move on. When I came to Tallow Dip I thought that I would locate there; but, in even so small a place as that, they have found me again, and I am tired of it."

He stopped again, and McKee, wise beyond his years, did not speak.

"Now, Tom," he resumed, turning to the other with a new light in his eyes, "I am going back and face the music. I am through with this life of deception and lying, and am going to give myself up. I lied to you a month ago. My name is Billy Tarkin—and those letters were mine."

There was a long silence, broken by McKee as he reached across the camp-fire and shook the other man by the hand.

"I guess we'd better turn in now, John —Billy," he corrected himself.

Their ride back to camp the next day, and thence on into town—with the addition of the old man, to whom they told the story —was certainly anything but joyous. Still, Tarkin had resigned himself, and was an extremely nice fellow, continually poking fun at his two companions for their glum faces and funereal appearances.

When they finally reached Keeno, Tarkin gave himself up, and the sheriff immediately prepared to take him on to Chicago.

Standing on the rear platform of the train, Tarkin had only a moment in which to say good-by to his friends.

"Everything's going to turn out all right, Bill, old man," McKee spoke cheerfully. "Bess and I will expect a telegram to that effect until we get one."

"Yes, my boy," Finey agreed. "I, too, think that things will turn out O. K. If you're guilty, why, you'll have to take the punishment; but you can bet that they will have to have more than circumstantial evidence to do the trick. Good-by, Tarkin. Be sure to let us hear from you."

"I will. Good-by."

And shaking hands with the two men, he and the sheriff went into the train.

IV.

ARRIVING in Chicago, Tarkin practically led the sheriff to the address they were bound for.

A large new office-building proved to be their destination.

Entering it, the sheriff again took the lead, and they stepped into one of the elevators, were whisked to one of the upper floors, and walked down a short hall and into an office anteroom. The sheriff sent in a card, and they were immediately admitted to a large, well-appointed office, in the center of which there sat an iron-gray man at a huge, flat-topped desk.

Suddenly he looked up.

"So they finally got you, did they?" he asked sarcastically.

"No, they didn't, dad," young Tarkin answered, after a start of recognition. "I gave myself up."

His father looked intently at him; then, apparently noticing the other man for the first time, turned to him:

"Go into that other room. My secretary will talk to you."

When they were alone again he turned to his son.

"Well," he demanded, "why don't you get down on your knees and beg as you did once before?"

"Because I've learned how to be a real man," his son answered. "I'm sick of this life of ducking and dodging, and I have come back here to take my medicine."

"Do you realize what that means?" his father thundered.

"I do," he replied briefly.

"Are you not afraid to die?" the other asked him, his eyes piercing him through and through.

"No," his son answered.

For a moment there was a tense silence.

"Well, my boy, I am glad to hear that, even though there isn't any probability of your dying for a long time to come. No; now, don't interrupt me. Let me finish.

"Two weeks after you left Chicago I found out that you were not guilty of the charge that was made against you. The man who did the killing confessed. I immediately sat down and wrote you half a dozen telegrams and letters, but they were all returned unopened. Finally, in desperation, I swore out a false warrant for your arrest, and now you are back here again with me."

While his father had been talking the young man walked to the window and stood looking down at the busy thoroughfare. Turning impulsively, he said:

"I understand, dad; and now I must send off two telegrams to the Tallow Dip."

"Well, hurry them up, for you and I have an important dinner engagement with a lady, a friend of ours."

"A lady?" Tarkin, Jr., looked up from his writing with a dawning hope in his eyes. "It can't be Myra, for she stopped writing to me. Who is it, dad?"

"It's Myra, and she stopped writing to you because the letters always came back. Hurry up with those telegrams."

"Telegrams! Oh, they can wait till tomorrow."

And William Tarkin, alias John Smith, slipped into his overcoat, linked arms with his father, and hurried off.

A Cry from the Audience.

BY BEATRICE YORK HOUGHTON.

Where Hearts Beat Warm and Every Chair Holds a Friend for the Performer if She Makes Them Feel Sorry for Her.

THE woman with the wistful eyes looked round the theater, then turned to her companion with a sigh.

He, however, was intently studying the program, and his frowning brow did not invite interruption, so she turned once more to the stage.

She felt distinctly aggrieved that on this, one of the rare nights when they afforded a trip to the vaudeville, there should be anything dull in any of the performances. The wistfulness of her eyes showed how she longed for anything that might break the monotonous routine of her life.

The man, who was William Trail and her husband, whispered impatiently: "Do stop fidgeting, Evelyn."

"It's such a poor show," she whispered back.

"The next stunt's sure to be good," he replied. "You can't expect everything to be first-class, especially in a stock performance."

Evelyn bit her lip and tried to listen to the hackneyed song which the woman on the stage was singing. But there was nothing in the words or in the manner of delivering them which could arouse her interest. And the increasing restlessness of the audience testified to the general ennui.

Evelyn looked up at the singer impatiently, wondering how much longer the song would be. Then she was caught and held by the actress's utter lack of verve, by her listlessness and evident distaste for her employment.

Evelyn watched the singer with a new interest. She was Mlle. de Bray on the program, *danseuse* and *raconteuse*.

She had walked deliberately onto the stage, had told a scarcely funny story in a lifeless voice, and had then begun, without

further preliminaries, on the equally lifeless song.

She seemed to be entirely without make-up. Her dress was carelessly put on, her hair brushed anyhow, and her hollow eyes and white cheeks showed ghastly in the limelight.

As she droned on, Evelyn found herself wondering what place this tragic face and figure could have on the lively vaudeville stage. Why should a reputable house have engaged her? Was the woman aware of the distaste for her which the audience so plainly showed?

Mlle. de Bray began on the chorus of her song and on the half-hearted gyrations which evidently established her claims to a *danseuse.*

Evelyn yawned behind her program and glanced at her husband. His frown made her feel like a very small, very naughty girl.

The singer began on the second verse of her song.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" thought Evelyn. "Will she never get through?"

A momentary bustle caused by some late comers distracted the audience for a space, but the lifeless voice droned on.

Then there happened something which stirred the entire house, brought William Trail from his frowning displeasure with a start, and roused Evelyn to the eagerest interest.

For a little girl, one of the late comers, had jumped to her feet with a tense cry of joy.

"My mama!" she shrieked excitedly. "Oh, it is—it is my mama!"

The woman upon the stage stopped singing as though shot. She looked like an automaton suddenly galvanized into life.

Her face expressed rapidly the gamut of emotions from the daze of non-comprehension, to the dawning of a joy almost too great. She stood quite still, straining toward the part of the theater from whence the cry of the little child had come, listening with parted lips and panting breast for a repetition of it.

In the dead silence the elderly woman with the child could be heard hushing her to silence, while the little thing, half-abashed, began to cry.

"Helen," breathed Mlle. de Bray at last. "Oh, Helen, can it be you? The lights blind me, but surely, surely that was your voice. Speak to me again, my darling—my darling—"

The agonized tones rose to a scream of supplication.

The audience sat breathless. The elderly woman, embarrassed past endurance, rose and began to push the unwilling child down the aisle.

The little girl made a desperate struggle and succeeded in wrenching herself free. Sobbing loudly, she ran toward the stage.

Mlle. de Bray leaned far out over the footlights, and the child reached up her tiny arms. The first violinist lifted her high, and in another moment she and the singer were clasped in a close embrace.

There was nothing left of droning lifelessness about the singer now. All woman and all mother, in utter self-forgetfulness she sobbed and cooed over the little girl.

The elderly woman in the aisle spoke in troubled tones.

"I s'pose you must be her mother," she said doubtfully.

"Oh, I am—I am," cried Mlle. de Bray, lifting a radiant face to the eager crowd. Then a realization of her position seemed to dawn upon her.

"I ask your pardon," she cried, springing to her feet, and still retaining her hold upon the child as though afraid to let her go. She laughed a delicious little laugh.

"I owe you all the explanation," she began, and her voice and her face were alive and glowing, and her charm was unmistakable. "I lost my little Helen six months ago. There was an accident, you remember? A street-car collided with a taxi. You surely remember."

She paused as though for answer, and then resumed.

"I was hurt. They carried me to the hospital, and all that I know is, that when I woke up from my long illness no one could tell me anything at all about my little girl. They thought that I had dreamed her."

Suddenly her manner changed from the joyous to the accusing. She addressed herself to the elderly woman still standing uncertainly in the aisle.

"And you kept my baby," she cried. "You kept her from me when my heart was breaking. What right had you? What right?"

The elderly woman stiffened, and in her turn lost consciousness of the audience. She was the guilty before her judge, and she began her justification.

"I had every right," she said indig-

nantly. "I took the child home with me. I seen she was all alone, and they said you were dead. She was so pretty I wanted her real bad, and I done my best for her. You can see that.

"Then when they printed all that about your coming to and wanting her, I just couldn't give her up. And I feel I did right. An actress isn't no sort of a mother for a little girl to have.

"I just couldn't give her up," repeated the elderly woman. "And I'm awfully sorry I come in here to-night. She begged so, and I saw there were trained animals on the program—"

Mlle. de Bray still stood silent, caressing with one hand the child who nestled against her skirts. The audience still sat in its trance of interest.

The elderly woman's troubled eyes roved over the faces about her, over the faces farther off, settling at last on the happy mother and child.

"I s'pose I did wrong," she said at last in a stifled sort of voice. "But I never did approve of actors. It'll just about break my heart to give Helen up. Will you let me see her sometimes?"

"You kept her from me," said the actress simply, but in the one short sentence lay all the agony she had endured.

The elderly woman seemed to accept it as her answer, and she walked slowly down the aisle and through the door into the lobby. The actress stood quite still until the door had shut. Then she breathed a long sigh of relief and spoke again with the winsome joyousness of a happy woman in her voice.

"With your permission we will go now," she said. "To-morrow night Helen and I will dance together for you. But not now—"

The silence which followed her withdrawal testified to the appreciation of the audience for her new-found joy.

Evelyn smiled happily into her husband's eyes, and he forgot to frown. Perhaps they could enter more deeply into the sorrow and happiness of Mlle. de Bray than people who were not childless.

Later, as they were walking down the street together, Evelyn dared to speak out some of her thoughts about it all, and her husband was appreciative, though he grumbled a little as was his wont.

"That's just like a woman," he commented. "Wants to know how people have suffered just for the sake of seeing them happy at the end."

Evelyn pouted.

"I hate commonplaceness," she said, then, "Oh, Will, see—" she cried, and stood quite still.

For, strolling happily toward them down the street, were Mlle. de Bray, little Helen, and the elderly lady. As they came up Evelyn could not forbear to speak.

"I am so glad for you," she cried to Mlle. de Bray, "and I am so very, very glad that you have forgiven her."

She indicated the elderly woman.

"That is the loveliest part of it all. I wish all the audience could know of it."

Mlle. de Bray stood looking at Evelyn with a quizzical smile. But whatever she may have intended to say was never said. Helen had taken the reins.

"Don't I do it fine?" she asked proudly. "Mama says I'm going to be a great actress when I grow up."

And strangest of all, when Helen said *mama* she took the hand of the elder lady.

"I don't understand," said Evelyn.

Mlle. de Bray laughed shortly.

"Why, that was our act," she explained. "I'm not in the regular stock, though I let on that I am. I'm on the road; and we give this each first night. It's the greatest drawing card—"

"And wasn't there any accident?" asked Evelyn.

"There's always accidents," laughed Mlle. de Bray. "Sometimes they're a year back and sometimes a month. Just so I can strike on a big one, it's all the same for my act."

"Oh," breathed Evelyn.

"I'm sorry you're disappointed," said Mlle. de Bray kindly. "I wouldn't have let on if Helen hadn't given it away. This here's my mother, too, and Helen is my littlest sister. Come and see us dance to-morrow night."

But Evelyn could not answer.

In the wistfulness again of her eyes, and in the tired droop of her mouth, could be read all of her disappointment and chagrin. And for once her husband understood.

He bade the actress and her people good-night for his weary little wife, and when he had opened their own door, he stooped and kissed that little mouth right where the droop was.

And he said not one word about Evelyn's disillusionment, not one single word.

A Daredevil's Hazard.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

The Precious Cargo That Was Entrusted to a Ne'er-Do-Well, and the Desperate Expedient He Put in Practise To Safeguard It.

"WELL, I am glad you reached the conclusion that I am good for something," and Bob Kane carelessly blew the smoke from his cigarette toward an open window, scarcely looking at his father, who had been talking.

"You have not proven that you are good for this," calmly replied the elder man. "I confess that almost the entire directorate of the bank opposed me when your name was mentioned."

"I haven't asked the privilege of sacrificing my life for the bank. Why not let some of their wishy-washy good boys do it?" Bob remarked.

"Because," said Mr. Kane, "they can't."

"Ho! Is it possible? Well, well, well!"

"The question is," went on Mr. Kane, "will you do it?"

"If you let me drive my own horses, take my own brake, and don't trouble me with a lot of orders and advice. I know what I'm up against better than you do. The thing must be done at night."

"We all agree to that. You will have an escort of twelve men, all well-armed and mounted. Sergeant Kearney with five soldiers from the fort, and five of the marshal's men."

"That ought to do," said Bob. "When does the stunt come off?"

"To-night. At midnight, we thought."

"I'll be on the job."

"Part of the bank officials will be at the old bank in Sorona to make sure everything is taken, and part of them will be at the new bank in New Sorona to receive you when you arrive."

"That's all right."

As though the duty to which he had been assigned was nothing, Bob Kane finished his noonday meal, and then, taking his dog and gun and horse, went out hunting for anything he could find to shoot, if it was worth the ammunition.

Bob Kane was a prize problem to his father, while to his mother he was a source of constant terror.

His career at two or three colleges had ended in disaster. He had no use for higher education. He was of medium height, made of steel, apparently unbreakable, and unbending. He was a free-hearted, careless chap of twenty, as ready to fight an enemy as shake hands with a friend.

Every time he left the house his mother knew he would be brought home dead, and his father was often on the point of saying he hoped so. Not that he hated his only son. Not at all. But he knew this terrible thing would eventually happen and it might save his wife's reason to have it happen now, and over with.

He was liberal with Bob. Money was no object to the president of the Sorona Bank.

It was the richest bank in the Dakotas. It carried a large surplus, had a great safe deposit vault, and all the big miners and ranchers for many miles around were its depositors.

The town of Sorona had been built in what had seemed a favorable location, right on the proposed line of the Dakota and Southern Railway. Years had made it a prosperous town. But! The railroad company had altered its plans, changed the line on account of some lawsuits over right of way, and had laid the tracks twenty miles north of the old Sorona.

The men of money in Sorona, those at the head of the bank, those at the head of the big sawmills, the grist mills, the manufacturing establishments that had sprung up on "promises," agreed that this change in the plan of the railroad meant ruin for every one of them if they clung to the old place. For, almost on a straight line north of the town, and right on the line of the railway, there was a site much more advantageous for a city, with water-power, good land, and timber for building, and clay to make brick. In fact, there chanced to be a spot right there so favorable in every way for the development of a new town that Sorona felt its doom hovering very close.

But the men who had made Sorona what it was were not slow-moving creatures. They might rail and curse at the railroad company all they chose, but they knew that railing and cursing were not going to stay the march of progress to the north, nor the ruin of their own establishments. They met. They talked. They acted.

If the railroad would not come to Sorona, Sorona would go to the railroad. Before the tracks were ready for the first train, a land company had been formed, the best land along the line had been secured, and in a wonderfully short space of time New Sorona came into being.

Houses and buildings that were worth saving were taken apart and carted twenty miles north and rebuilt. Old houses were abandoned, and new houses in New Sorona were erected for the owners.

The land company, backed by the wealthiest men, helped out those who had no available cash to make the move. With the railroad close at hand, everybody would benefit to a degree that would pay for every outlay.

And now but few remained in the old Sorona, and it was time they were going. The last to move was the bank.

A fine, spacious building had been erected at New Sorona, much larger, and much safer than the old one, with a big, new steel vault, and improved deposit safes for those who wished to hire them.

The removal of the treasure from one bank to the other had caused more talk, argument, and fear than anything else connected with the wholsesale transfer of the town.

"We have," said the cashier, at the last conference, "gold and silver in the bank vaults and the safe deposit vaults up to something like half a ton or more, I should say."

"Impossible!" Kane, the president, had objected.

"Oh, well, I'm not much of a judge of weight. But I know what money is on the books, and there is a good deal of unminted gold in the private vaults. Now, this is no simple matter. We have on hand something like a hundred thousand dollars in gold certificates, and over seventy-five thousand in new silver certificates. And more in old bank-notes, treasury-notes, and—"

"That's enough," said Kane. "No need of an inventory. The thing we want is a safe transport."

"We want a man to drive who is not afraid of—"

"The devil himself," put in one of the directors.

"Your son, Kane, comes the nearest to that," said another.

"Huh! Suppose he runs off with the whole business?"

"We'll take care of that."

"Very well, gentlemen, if it is your wish, I will order my son to do it. There is no question in my mind but that he will gladly accept. If I told him I would like a feather from the tail of an eagle on top of Devil's Bluff, he would get there, and bring me the feather, with the eagle attached. And if he doesn't know anything else he does know how to drive and shoot."

"Yes, we know that," was the comment.

And know it they did. To see Bob Kane careering through the streets of Sorona driving four coal-black horses lashed to soapy foam, his brake on two wheels most of the time, and himself sitting calmly with a cigarette in his mouth, was a common enough sight. But, though it was a common sight, the young women of Sorona said they always tasted their heart blood in their throats when they saw him doing it.

Thus it was that Bob Kane had been informed by his father what was required of him. There were bad men in that region; men badly wanted by the United States marshals and by sheriffs of more counties than one. Trains were frequently held up. Express messengers, engineers, and conductors were often shot. Passengers were relieved of their valuables.

The transportation of a wagonload of good money twenty miles over a rough country was no light undertaking.

When the escort assembled that night it

was composed of brave men. Their rifles were ready; their horses fresh; their faces grim.

Mr. Kane and the cashier, and a force of tellers and bookkeepers, were on hand to count and check off the specie and paper money as it was taken from the vaults. Owners of private vaults were there to attend the transfer of their treasure.

The bank officials and clerks were not to accompany the escort. It was almost certain that a fight would take place. The bank could not afford to lose any of its employees then. They would all be needed in setting matters straight in the bank at New Sorona.

Bob had his four coal-blacks. They were nettlesome, and in great spirits. Bob himself calmly sat on the seat with the reins in his hands and the inevitable cigarette in his mouth.

He could be spared. If a bandit's bullet got him in the brain, or heart, or the *medulla oblongata,* or some other vital spot, the world would wag on as usual. His mother would shed tears, and perhaps his father would be sorry for a while. But—

Bob was no soliloquizer. He was there to drive, and he knew he could do it.

He had removed the rear seats from the brake, making it a mere load-carrying machine, and into its capacious body boxes and chests and bags were placed in solid and mathematical arrangement.

"All is ready," said Mr. Kane. "Bob, be careful."

"Oh, don't fret! Get to New Sorona as safely as this junk, and don't bother us."

On one side of the brake rode the sergeant and five troopers of the regular army. On the left rode the United States marshal and five of his picked deputies.

"Go ahead!" directed the marshal.

The hour of starting was long past midnight. Counting and checking money is no job to be done hastily.

The four blacks that had made almost every heart in Sorona beat faster seemed to realize the prodigious responsibility that rested on them. With the treasure of a large section of Dakota behind them they started, held to a decent pace by the iron and experienced hand of Bob Kane.

"This is easy," said a deputy marshal. "Fine night, good money waiting for us, and a breakfast in New Sorona! What?"

In this fancied security the cavalcade rode five miles. Here the country was wild and rugged, the road leading along precipices or through mountain passes, with splendid places for ambush on either side.

Suddenly from behind a rocky fastness came a rifle-shot.

"Halt!" commanded the sergeant.

The guard surrounded the treasure-wagon. Guns barked from behind trees and rocks. From above, on the crest of hills, the bullets descended. The coal-black horses, unused to such receptions, reared and snorted.

Bob's arms were almost torn from their sockets. He dared not look to see how many of the escort were shot. He had his own duty to perform.

He was not there to fight. He was there to drive. In fact, except for a revolver in his pocket, he had nothing to fight with, and it was impossible for him to use a hand to get the revolver out.

Then up rose from rocks and mounds men in numbers no one could count in the darkness that comes before dawn.

They swarmed down toward the mounted guard. The rifle volleys were tremendous. The horses could not be controlled much longer.

Two armed men ran to the heads of the leaders.

"Hey, you fellows, do the fighting!" Bob yelled at the top of his voice. "I'm away! Gatalangyo-o-o!"

Bob had a vocabulary of his own in speaking to his horses. And the horses were educated to that language. They darted forward. The two bandits who had tried to seize their bridles were hurled to the ground as though they had been struck by pile-drivers.

There was a jolt and lurch as the wheels passed over one of them; and then on, on like the very wind, went the four blacks, with the treasure of the bank behind them and Bob sitting forward, his hands gripping the reins as though they had grown to them; no cigarette in his mouth now, but a tense, determined expression in his eyes.

"Twelve men to guard a million!" he muttered to himself. "They wanted the whole United States army."

On and on he drove, the firing growing fainter behind him, until he could hear none of it. The battle was over, or he had gone too far to catch any sounds of it.

He pulled in his horses and went along at a slower pace.

But the gang, under a leadership as skilful and shrewd as had ever managed a

great raid on treasure, had not been lacking in foresight. The first detachment of marauders the guard had met had been sent merely to begin the attack.

Now, as Bob was going along at a trot, his lathered horses still prancing in their splendid strength, there rose before him at each side men armed with glistening rifles.

"Halt, Bob Kane!" came the command of the leader.

Bob's teeth set and his call to his horses followed. They leaped against their collars as a caged lion might leap against the iron bars. But these men were prepared. Six of them succeeded in climbing into the brake. Two rifles were pressed against Bob. One at his head, the other at his back.

"Don't shoot yet," said the man directly behind him. "Nobody else can drive these horses."

"We'll make him take us there," Bob heard the man who was threatening to blow out his brains reply.

"See here, Kane," said a louder and calmer voice, "you are up against it. We know you've got all the gold and silver and paper money from the bank. But you won't go to New Sorona with it. You drive where I tell you, or you'll be blown to pieces. There are six of us here."

Bob was not slow at thinking, if he was inattentive to college studies.

A perfect torrent of thought rushed through his brain. Some of it was mere guesswork. Some of it was the quickest planning he had ever done.

In reply to the words of the bandit chief, he nodded.

"Do you know where the Corkscrew Pass goes around the Devil's Temple?" asked the bandit.

Bob nodded again.

"Can you make it?"

Again Bob nodded.

"Do you know where the Wanton River comes from the gorge into the Buffalo Basin?"

Again the nod, but no words from the stout-hearted driver.

"Go there. Deviate from that route and we'll shoot you so full of holes you won't cast a shadow. Go!"

And well Bob knew the terrible ordeal ahead of his splendid horses. The Corkscrew Pass was a winding road along a high and crooked bluff called, on account of its inaccessibility and its many impregnable hiding-places for bandits, the Devil's Temple.

For more than two miles this winding road, sometimes almost completing a circle as it followed the line of the bluff and the gorge of the Wanton River, ran along the edge of a precipice. On one side the bluff rose sheer to the summit. On the other side it was an unscalable façade of rock to the roaring, fuming water of the river below.

Buffalo Basin was a depression in the land, a level space of about three square miles, surrounded by high, steep bluffs, over which the Indians, many years ago, had driven great herds of bison, or so-called buffalo, from the great table-lands above over the precipices to sure destruction.

With his jaw set like iron, his hands now aching from the terrific pull on them, Bob turned from the road to New Sorona and as he gave the vernacular to his horses, they once more leaped out of their trot and started once more on that fearful gait that had carried them away from the former scene of battle.

He knew that until he landed the bandits in their haunts in Buffalo Basin he was safe. There was not one of them could handle that quartet of blooded horses.

There might be stage-drivers who could take their own steeds through the Corkscrew Pass, but there was not a pair of hands except his own that could guide the horses he had bought himself and trained.

It was not long before he had swung on to the beginning of the dangerous road, and into his heart there came a determination that, if shown under any other circumstances, would have stamped him insane.

He swung his brake into the winding trail, and from far below him came the roar of a cataract.

He spoke to his horses. Fire flashed from their eyes. Dawn was appearing, but a haze hung over the gorge.

The speed was increased. The heavy wagon swung from side to side, as the sixteen hoofs beat wildly on the stony road.

"You'll have us over," yelled the leader of the gang.

Bob shook his head, yet he knew there was such a possibility staring him in the face.

"He wouldn't kill himself," shouted another.

It had become a question with Bob whether he was going to kill himself or not. He knew that unless he managed by some act of superlative recklessness to get rid of the men who were ready to shoot

him at the slightest sign of disobedience, his life was forfeited anyway.

He knew something of the outlaws that infested that region. He felt perfectly sure that once he had guided his horses down the dangerous pass, and reached the stronghold of the bandits, they would never permit him to leave and report to the authorities where they had taken the treasure.

Ruthless, they were ready to sacrifice a score of lives for the wealth they felt was in their clutches now.

Careful driving might save the treasure. Bob knew it was not going to save his life.

If, then, by sacrificing himself he could at the same time kill the bandits, he would be no wosre off, and he reasoned that eventually the searching parties would find the brake with its precious load.

Bob's eyes, could the bandits have looked into them, would have made them think. Bob himself was doing more thinking than he ever had done in his life before. He was leaning forward, his eagle glance on the road ahead, every impulse given to the reins by his tense fingers instantly obeyed by his well-trained horses.

The bandits gasped. They were brave and reckless men. In the saddle, and armed for fighting, they feared neither God nor man.

But this was different. They were at the mercy of a man they dared not kill—dared not even touch or disturb. They knew that the slightest inadvertence on the part of the driver would bewilder the horses, and men, treasure, and all would go whirling through space to the rocks below.

They could not command him to go slow. They had ordered him, at the muzzle of their rifles, to drive them down that road. To slacken speed on that narrow ledge, if even one horse got fractious, would be likely to spill them over the awful brink.

A desperate idea entered Bob's mind. He believed his life was as good as gone, anyway. He could see no way of escaping the murderous gang once he had driven them to their lair.

It was not his life he was thinking of saving. It was the treasure. If he must die, he wanted to die game. He wanted to prove to his father that the trust reposed in in him had not been misplaced.

Yet, there remained in his mind a love of life, and he would not throw it away needlessly. If he must die to save the treasure, he would. But he would not let the highwaymen kill him and keep the money.

They were getting nearer and nearer the gate of rocks that led on to the level ground of Buffalo Basin.

Bob knew that before they reached that gate they must pass the most difficult and perilous part of the drive. The gorge itself at this point was no longer dangerous. The road broadened, and the descent was not so great.

But there was, right in the way of ascending and descending teams, a great white rock. The road had been turned aside by the engineers to avoid this rock. Nobody but themselves knew why they had not shattered it with dynamite. But the place had been spoken of as a possibility for a national, or at least a State park, and the great glistening rock had been left a sentinel at the gate of the basin.

It was no easy matter to drive a four-horse outfit around that rock even at an ordinary pace. But Bob did not slacken speed.

Had the bandits known what was in his mind, they would have emptied their rifles into his body and shot the horses dead.

He did not intend to swing round that rock at all.

He breathed heavily. He thought of his mother and father. Perhaps for the first time since he was a child at his mother's knee he murmured a prayer. In the mad, desperate chance he was going to take, there was scarcely a hope that he would come out alive. But he hoped he might save the treasure.

He saw the rock through the haze. The bandits saw it too.

"Look out for the big rock!" was shouted in his ear.

Bob nodded. Bracing himself, calling into action every straining nerve of his athletic frame, he kept on straight, directly toward that ominous rock.

Then, when it seemed as though the horses would go crashing to their death against it, with a mighty effort, and a shout the animals understood, Bob swung them aside, letting the brake go on toward the rock.

With the reins in his hands, Bob leaped to the back of the right wheeler, just as the wagon went smashing and crashing against the rock. There were curses and cries of dismay, but Bob did not hear them. With a smashed vehicle, spilling wounded

men and treasure by the way, the horses, furiously mad by now, dashed on, and Bob was thrown.

How long he lay there he did not know. When he recovered consciousness he found himself with an aching head and a leg he thought was broken.

The horses had become entangled among some trees. One lay dead. The others were quiet.

The brake was a mass of ruin. Scattered along the road were bags and boxes, and lying here and there were—but Bob did not dare to think of it.

Yet, nerving himself, he dragged one man after another to a secluded spot. They were not dead, but there was little chance they would be able to move in some time.

To make sure, Bob took what harness could be used, and all the reins but enough for a bridle for one horse, and bound the bruised and battered bandits hand and foot, placing them so far apart that even if they did recover consciousness they could not assist one another.

Then picking out the horse that seemed the least injured, and bathing his bruised but not broken leg with the cool water of the stream, he mounted.

Up the winding road he went as fast as he could urge his weary steed. He ached in every joint. He felt dizzy, and at times almost fell. But by sheer pluck and will power he held on.

He reached the top. Halting to give his horse a breathing-spell, he struck off toward New Sorona.

And all New Sorona was in a frenzied condition. It bordered on mania. The marshals and soldiers had been victorious, but their victory amounted to little, for the bank's treasure was gone.

They had ridden like mad to New Sorona to give an account of the attack and the dash Bob had made with the money. But no trace of him had been seen along the road. And now, before the fine, new bank building, men, women, and children were gathered in varying stages of delirium.

Men cursed with pallid lips. Some said the daredevil had simply run away with the bank's treasure. He never was any good, anyway.

But suddenly somebody gave a shout.

"Look! He's coming!"

And with his black horse now almost white with foam, and himself reeling in the saddle, Bob galloped up to the group.

He saw but one figure—the tall, commanding form of his father, the president of the bank.

"The Buffalo Basin!" he cried. "It is all there, but hurry. Take wagons. Everything is smashed and—"

Then he reeled from the saddle and fell into his father's arms unconscious.

Quick, sharp commands were given, and a cavalcade was soon on the way to Buffalo Basin. The treasure was recovered, and the bandits turned over to the sheriff.

The railroad made good its promises, and New Sorona grew in population and prosperity. And one of its most honored citizens is Mr. Robert Kane, once a daredevil, but now a vice-president of the New Sorona Bank.

A PRAYER.

Oh, Life, in this my journey
Along thy hidden ways,
Give me nor peace nor quiet
Of uneventful days;
But grant me joy of battle,
The striving for the light,
The glory of the combat,
The foremost foe to fight.
I shall not quail at hunger
Nor aught of bitterness,
So I but meet unashamed
The struggle and the stress!
Yea, dole me fiercest anguish,
If that the end may be
Through power of understanding
A signal victory!

Charlotte Becker.

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Its whiteness suggests its purity — and appeals to them. It floats always within easy reach — the youngster doesn't have to dive for it. The shape of the cake is oval — it fits the hand to a nicety.

Being made from edible products, Fairy Soap agrees with even the tender skin of a babe, and cleanses thoroughly without irritating.

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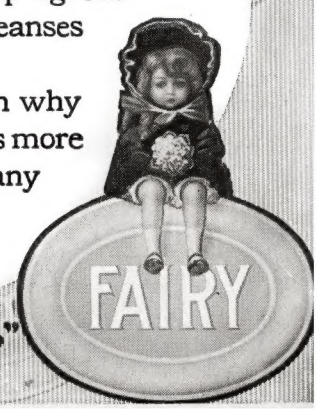

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